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# SIX NON-LISTENING PATTERNS IN STAKEHOLDER NETWORKS

*A Grounded Theory Model*

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**Master of Science**

In the Department of Management and Marketing,  
University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon

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## Abstract

Listening is a key social mechanism that contributes to the dynamics of stakeholder relationships in marketing systems. Accordingly, this research seeks a fuller-bodied understanding of situational dynamics where stakeholders do not feel listened to. It uses grounded theory methods to construct meaning from in-depth interviews with eighteen Saskatchewan women engaged as stakeholders in nuclear issues. **The outcome of this research is a grounded theoretical framework recognizing six patterns of non-listening interaction.** Those types are: blocking (vs. expression), isolation (vs. access), withdrawal (vs. presence), dismissal (vs. consideration), refusal (vs. compliance) and finally disruption, which occupies a distinct role. The new model addresses a need for listening theory that is compatible with stakeholder network models and marketing systems analysis. It offers a complex understanding of listening relationships between all types of stakeholders and can be applied to analyze stakeholder interaction and dysfunction in conflict-ridden marketing systems.

**Keywords:** listening, perceived listening, stakeholder engagement, grounded theory, stakeholder network theory, women's experiences, interviews, consultation, dialogue, social license, marketing systems, social mechanisms, nuclear technology, communication, MAS theory

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*“This country is being managed to death, being public-related to death.”*

*—Kurt Vonnegut*

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## **Acknowledgements**

Many, many thanks to my cheerleaders and support team for helping carry me through a very challenging four years and see me through the completion of this thesis: Karen Lloyd, Sara Sestak, Katrina Mitchell, Dr. John Matic, Dr. Alana Holt, Sue Mamer-Dauvin, Dr. Maureen Bourassa, Courtney Schroeder, Dr. Marjorie Delbaere, Dr. Barb Phillips, and last but not least the welcoming and friendly Pokémon Go community of Saskatoon. ♥ Thanks also to financial support provided by the Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the University of Saskatchewan Graduate Students' Association.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Research Area and Opportunity

Our society and its expectations for industry-public communication have shifted. Industries and governments are increasingly expected to include public input on large decisions; indeed, work in the areas of policy studies, public relations, and stakeholder engagement has variously stressed the importance of two-way communication for complex issues in multi-stakeholder networks (Ayuso, Rodriguez and Ricart 2006; Culbertson and Chen 1997; Kent and Taylor 2002). Bell and Morse (2004) note that hearing is common, but listening is rare.

This two-way communication presumes that messages are exchanged in both directions, and often includes some elements of response-giving. But few papers on two-way communication have focused on how reciprocal messages in a network context are received, or listened to. Researchers and firms want listening to happen; a good deal of research discusses important pre-requisites to achieving listening outcomes. There is semi-overlapping literature from a firm perspective on “what listening is” and how to listen effectively in a stakeholder engagement context (Brunner 2008; Burnside-Lawry 2012; Roper 2005; Trapp 2014). However, there is little to no such research from a network-focused or societal marketing standpoint. Furthermore, definitions of listening and lists of its components are splintered, with little consistency within or across fields of study (Fontana, Cohen and Wolvin 2015).

Witkin (1990) asserts that a systems view of listening can resolve contradictory and disconnected research on the topic. Indeed, marketing systems analysis can provide both the “why” and the “how” for developing a better understanding of stakeholder listening. In his 2015 paper *Formation, Growth, and Adaptive Change in Marketing Systems*, Roger Layton defines marketing systems as “complex social networks of individuals and groups linked through shared participation in the creation and delivery of economic value through exchange” (p. 303). Stakeholder networks are, in effect, marketing systems. Exchange of value within these systems can include, for example: information, ideas, values, social capital, and social license to operate.

Within a marketing systems paradigm, stakeholder listening is a critical social mechanism, yet it is poorly conceptualized and understood. As per Layton’s Mechanism-Action-Structure (MAS) theory, actors in marketing systems choose and perform actions within the strategic action fields they interpret from their situation and context (Layton 2015). Social mechanisms are critical to the formation and co-evolution of these dynamic systems. Within the set of mechanisms “that lead to communication, shared understandings, and trust or at least cooperation among individuals” (p. 303), listening and non-listening are especially relevant. The current research can be considered a process investigation into these social mechanisms, which are socially performed and variably interpreted by network actors.

Useful models of reality help us navigate our world and make decisions. When one person says: “I’m listening” and another says “no, you’re not”; or when some members of a group feel listened to and others do not: who is right—if anyone? People conceptualize listening in different ways,

and listening is better understood as more than action: it is subjective *interaction*. Concepts of listening and non-listening arise from multiple subjective experiences, and a pragmatic approach must reflect this. The aim of my thesis is to provide a more useful model or theory which is inclusive of multiple, contrasting perspectives. Such a model would (1) offer greater overall understanding of complex stakeholder interactions; (2) fit with societal marketing and network models of stakeholder engagement, and (3) integrate with holistic, systems-based marketing theory and analysis.

## **1.2 Research Context**

Highly contested industries face particular challenges for communication, stakeholder engagement, and attaining cooperative outcomes on complex issues. The nuclear industry is one example, and shares many of its complicating factors with other industries such as wind power and toxicology (Cass and Walker 2009; Slovic 1999). Nuclear topics are very controversial, with both proponents and opponents possessing strong opinions and emotions on the technology's use (Slovic 1999). Therefore, the nuclear sector is a good context for investigating engagement and communication in complex networks of industry, government, and public stakeholders on controversial issues. This research is set in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, where nuclear sector involvement includes or has included: uranium mining, nuclear medicine, research, previous consideration for nuclear power, and early consideration for used fuel storage sites.

Uranium mining has long been an important part of Saskatchewan's economy, and the province is the second largest producer of uranium in the world (World Nuclear Association 2019). Especially relevant to the current project, three communities in Saskatchewan's North were previously considered as possible sites for building a deep geological repository to store Canada's used nuclear fuel. In 2010, these communities formally expressed interest in the project as part of an opt-in site consideration process by the Nuclear Waste Management Organization (NWMO) (Nuclear Waste Management Organization, n.d.). Two communities were dropped from consideration during early geological assessments in 2013; the third community remained under consideration for further geological studies. In 2015, the geography of the third site was deemed unsuitable and the NWMO withdrew.

Controversy surrounds the nuclear sector's involvement in Saskatchewan. Grassroots organizations have emerged in opposition to uranium mining and used fuel storage in the province (Coalition for a Clean Green Saskatchewan 2014; Committee for Future Generations 2015). During the period of the NWMO's involvement with northern communities, there was an extensive process of engagement including committee meetings, town halls, local debate, and newspaper coverage. These northern communities are small and tight knit. Especially for the location that was involved longest in the process, debate split the community apart along polarized lines, and animosity around the issue persists there to this day.

## **1.3 Outcomes and Contribution**

This research uses grounded theory to explore what it means to listen and be listened to in a stakeholder network. I aim to answer the question: *How is listening understood and experienced in a controversial stakeholder engagement context?* The theoretical insights in this paper are grounded in over 500 pages of first-hand experience from long-form interviews. The interviews were conducted with eighteen women in Saskatchewan's nuclear sector: supporters and

opponents, all with diverse backgrounds. My goal was to identify patterns and propose explanations of complex relationships—which, according to Cederlund (2014), is the essence of newly generated theory.

The outcome of this research is a new, grounded model explaining perceptions of non-listening between participants in a multi-stakeholder, controversial context. This model of non-listening integrates experience-based perspectives of listening and non-listening into a more cohesive whole. It provides much more depth than a components or features list. The new model begins to account for and explain *how* features of a communication event become interpreted in different ways, the results and outcomes that come from this, and the systems and underlying conditions that contribute to those interactions and their outcomes.

This new theoretical model reaches past the substantive level to offer the beginnings of a generalizable theory. Complex networks are ubiquitous, and macromarketing (in particular) seeks to apply a marketing framework to just about any network of social exchange. Even family relationships or classroom dynamics can be viewed as marketing systems. The principles and patterns outlined in this model have a wide range of relevance and applicability, far beyond the immediate or substantive context of controversial stakeholder engagement. Relationships, trust, co-operation, communication, agreement, and the systems by which communication practices, attempts, efforts and strategies adapt and change over time are relevant in many contexts. Listening issues are everywhere!

#### **1.4 Researcher's Statement**

My participation in this project was enriched by a personal interest in the research topic and context of study. I have followed public controversies around using nuclear power as a low-CO<sub>2</sub> energy source, and am continually frustrated by simplistic views of this debate that variously frame the other side as angry, emotional, selfish, or scientifically-illiterate. By the admission of those both for and against controversial projects, communication in this domain of public decision-making is dysfunctional and needs reform from its current state.

I care about science and technology *and* about its impacts on individuals and society. I also care deeply about power imbalances and fairness and kindness and empathy. I believe that people deserve to feel support, to be listened to, and to have their emotions validated. I assert that care and attention should be taken to improve interactions for the sake of all human beings, independent of the course of action ultimately taken for any prospective project.

The social and psychological impacts of interpersonal conflict, of being treated with disrespect, of feeling powerless, and of reciprocal hostility are real and harmful. I am personally invested in the findings of this research and their potential applications for reducing harm and resolving or mitigating conflict. One of the best personal takeaways from this project was the opportunity to hear and better understand so many diverse experiences and viewpoints shared by this study's participants.

I aspire for our society to maximize productivity, equality, and evidence-based practice but also our flexibility of thinking and of perceiving the world—and each other. Helping people to understand a perspective that is different from their own brings me fulfillment, especially when that understanding can help to improve or mend a relationship. I hope that insights uncovered through my thesis research may help contribute to this cause.

## **1.5 Structure of This Paper**

This paper continues with the following sections: Literature Review, Methods, Findings and Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion. First, a review of existing research situates this work in the literature on stakeholder theory and engagement within stakeholder networks. The literature review also outlines existing models and theories of listening, and reviews gender considerations that informed a decision to focus on women's perspectives for this study. The next section outlines the methodological approach: grounded theory. Careful attention is given to describing how that approach was employed, giving a full account of the process by which new theoretical insights were uncovered or constructed from data. The findings and analysis section comes next. This section is the core of the paper and puts forward a new, six-part model of non-listening interaction and interpretation. Descriptive examples and quotes from interviews provide a high level of detail and demonstrate the fit between data and this new theoretical framework. The discussion section follows up on the new model, tying it back to the literature by considering relevance, fit, and implications for both theory and practice.

## 2. Literature Review

This section reviews background literature relevant to the current study. It begins with an overview of stakeholder theory, discussing the traditional firm-centric paradigm as well as newer models that take a stakeholder network approach. It also summarizes ideas from literature on what constitutes “effective” stakeholder engagement.

The next and largest part of this literature review focuses on listening. It reviews listening theory as understood from fields such as marketing, business ethics, public relations, and CSR, with a number of articles from the *International Journal of Listening* in particular. I will show how listening is understood very differently both across and within different academic contexts. This highlights a need for a new, integrated understanding of listening that is compatible with stakeholder network paradigms and holistic analysis of complex marketing systems.

Third, I give a summary of related research on gender issues with regards to contested industries (like nuclear power), trust, risk perception, and communication. These points serve to highlight the value of qualitative research focused on understanding women’s experiences.

### 2.1 Stakeholder Theory

In contrast to “shareholder” (those with financial investment in an organization), “stakeholder” is a broader term that includes anyone with a vested interest in the organizations’ activities. This includes those who influence or are influenced by a firm’s actions. While shareholder theory expects firms to act in the exclusive best interests of their shareholders, stakeholder theory acknowledges the importance of other groups and organizations who are affected by a firm’s decisions—customers, employees, communities, and society. More formally, stakeholder theory “describes the corporation as a constellation of co-operative and competitive interests possessing intrinsic value” (Donaldson and Preston 1995, p. 67).

Stakeholder theory came about as a way of modelling a firm’s interactions with other key players in its action field. Marketing theory has undergone certain parallel shifts during this time. As a discipline, marketing has expanded beyond goods and services to include the communication of ideas. Furthermore, it has also placed greater emphasis on building lasting relationships between a firm and its consumers, a model which depends on relational rather than transactional interactions (Bagozzi 2010). Together, these changes combine in an expectation for firms to communicate and build positive relationships with diverse stakeholder groups and in so doing, include them as collaborators. The ultimate goal is cooperation in order to realize mutual benefits for industry, government, and society.

#### *Stakeholder Network Models*

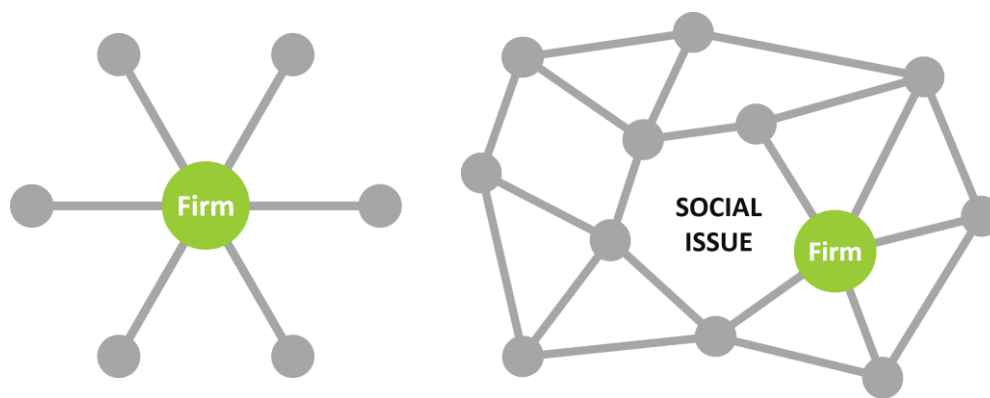
Development projects tend to involve a multitude of actors from different sectors—industry, government, and community—and collaboration between many stakeholders is difficult to achieve (Webler, Tuler, and Krueger 2001). Research and practice on community engagement (or stakeholder engagement) recognizes the interconnectedness of players in these networks and the

importance of building stakeholder relationships to realize company objectives (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi and Herremans 2010). Still, however, stakeholder engagement is most often framed as something a company does: a tool or strategy to manage its responsibilities towards society. This firm-centric framing prioritizes the objectives and strategies of individual companies. Concepts of “stakeholder” that prioritize firm objectives also perpetuate an assumption of conflict between the organization’s goals and those of its stakeholders (Greenwood 2007).

Further paradigm shifts in stakeholder theory bring it into better alignment with collaborative goals. More recent literature has given rise to a contrasting perspective on stakeholder engagement. In this new perspective, the firm is no longer viewed as the central hub in a stakeholder network (Figure 2.1). Instead, networks of stakeholders form around common social issues, and the firm is embedded as a stakeholder within a network of other stakeholders (Payne and Calton 2004; Roloff 2008; Svendsen and Laberge 2005; Wheeler, Colbert and Freeman 2003). This perspective can help avoid producing research that is implicitly aligned with firm objectives. Instead, it takes a societally focused approach where positive outcomes are more collaboratively defined. In the current study I use this approach as a lens to explore communication interactions in stakeholder engagement.

**FIGURE 2.1 – STANDARD VERSUS NETWORK MODEL OF STAKEHOLDER INTERACTION**

Left, standard model: firm is prioritized at the center of interactions with different stakeholders.  
Right, network model: firm is embedded in a stakeholder network which forms around a social issue.



### ***Effective Stakeholder Engagement***

Opinions are divisive on how stakeholder engagement should happen, and there is interest in systematic methods of achieving stakeholder participation (Amaeshi and Crane 2007; Green and Hunton-Clarke 2003). For example, Daboub and Calton (2002) advocate for inclusion of all stakeholders by way of multi-stakeholder learning dialogues. But how to accomplish this? Involving a diverse range of stakeholders is difficult, especially when public opinions do not form a consensus on what constitutes good practice for public participation itself (Webler, Tuler, and Krueger 2001). There are many ways to implement public participation, which most often is still viewed in a firm-centric way as the company initiating or facilitating such (Bayley and French 2008).

Researchers recognize that not all stakeholder engagement is created equal. Stakeholders can have a range of involvement; for example, Bell and Morse (2004) label some engagement as “pseudo-participation”—where a stakeholder has a representative role with no real power or influence. Green and Hunton-Clarke (2003) define a typology of stakeholder participation strategies with

increasing levels of involvement: *informative*, *consultative*, and *decision*. A great many distinctions of this sort can be found in literature (Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi and Herremans 2010).

Power and control are recurring topics in stakeholder engagement theory, with divergent views on how these dynamics help or hinder effective engagement. Some research takes the perspective that engaging with stakeholders is synonymous with managing them; exercising control as a form of strategic action (Foster and Jonker 2005). For example, effective stakeholder engagement can be defined as managing a firm's relationships with its stakeholders in order to benefit the firm (Amaeshi and Crane 2007). Other organizations invest in a more two-way relationship where concerns of both parties are carefully considered, even when these concerns are in conflict: Foster and Jonker (2005) label this approach as "communicative action". Ayuso, Rodriguez and Ricart (2006) make note that non-hierarchical structures and openness to change are useful for effective integration of stakeholder knowledge. This point is interesting because it suggests that power and control hierarchies (including between a firm and its stakeholders in the first place) may not be ideal for integrating the insights gained from effective engagement. Accordingly, some researchers note that conventional, structured control activities (like public hearings) are often frustrating for everyone involved. Instead, appropriate collaboration and consensus strategies lead to successful engagement compared with traditional approaches (Walker, Senecah and Daniels 2006).

Many researchers call attention to the importance of relationships and listening as focal elements of stakeholder theory and practice. Greenwood (2007) makes the case that stakeholder engagement is undertheorized: more research needs to focus on relationship attributes rather than focusing too narrowly on characteristics of the organizations or stakeholders that form these relationships. Similarly, Parmar et al. (2010) argue that future research needs to focus on stakeholder relationships as the primary unit of analysis. There exists a pressing need for framework-driven methods to improve stakeholder communication (Bhattacharya and Korschun 2008). Even when seen through a strategic, relationship-management lens, effective stakeholder interaction involves dialogue, engagement, participation, and open two-way communication (Amaeshi and Crane 2007). From any stakeholder perspective, listening is critical both for sending and receiving messages. For outgoing messages, communication cannot be controlled by a sender because receivers will always interpret messages in their own context (Foster and Jonker 2005). For incoming messages, accessing and integrating knowledge from other stakeholders involves listening deeply and with empathy (Ayuso, Rodriguez and Ricart 2006).

## **2.2 What is Listening?**

The current research is important because research and common practice have often treated communication as a one-directional broadcast—or more recently, as an exchange of information—without looking too closely at how that information is received, or listened to. Whether seen as strict information-gathering, as a response-giving process, or as set of behaviours, I will show that listening is nonetheless viewed positively for bringing strategic, relational, and/or collaborative benefits. But the subjective nature of perceived listening makes it difficult to measure or assess. Concepts of what listening is vary widely, and expectations for effective listening differ by person and across contexts. Listening is a dimension of human experience, and attempts at stark objectivity are less useful here. In these next pages, I will demonstrate the need for a new, network-based framework for understanding listening and non-listening interactions in a multi-stakeholder context.

### ***Listening Definitions and Components***

Some research frames listening as a one-directional, information gathering process. Listening is seen as data collection *from* stakeholders; a goal to facilitate listening invites questions of how best to solicit this feedback (Roper 2005; Trapp 2014). Responding to stakeholders and publics is still seen as important CSR strategy, but listening is spoken of separately from the response component (Roper 2005). This implies that listening is conceptualized as precursor to giving a response but does not include the response. Listening is also implied to be separate from involvement in decision-making; the behaviour of public relations professionals is described as "just" listening—that is, making decisions after listening and gathering information, but not involving stakeholders in this decision-making process (Trapp 2014).

Conversely, other research includes response-giving as an integral part of the listening process itself. Brunner (2008) refers to listening communication as a dimension of business relationships, and cites Galanes and Brilhart (1997) to operationally define it as “hearing what a speaker says, interpreting accurately, and responding appropriately.” Likewise, Castleberry and Shepherd (1993, p. 36) define salesperson listening as a cognitive process: “actively sensing, interpreting, evaluating and responding to verbal and nonverbal messages.” Ramsey and Sohi (1997) cite this definition as well, and also list other definitions from various fields. Many of these refer only to constructing meaning and making sense of information, but Ramsey and Sohi ultimately include “responding” as a key dimension in their own construct of perceived salesperson listening. These definitions depict a more broad and interactive listening process, with more scope than mere comprehension of another person’s message.

Coakley, Halone, and Wolvin (1996) define listening competency to include a strong behavioural component. Scales and inventories of listening include many examples of traits or behaviours that are responsive in nature. One of the most common traits found by Fontana, Cohen, and Wolvin (2015) in 33 out of 53 listening scales is simply “listener responds or gives feedback”. Other common scale traits refer to summarizing/paraphrasing what was said, giving clear responses and explanations, using understandable language when responding, asking questions for additional information, expressing feelings, and indicating to the speaker that the listener understands and is listening. Clearly, being judged a good listener requires response-giving: social signalling of the listening process in some way.

### ***Listening Outcomes and Importance***

Outcomes of listening are also framed in different ways. Perspectives that construe listening as only information-gathering are likely to emphasize firm-centric, non-relational strategic benefits. Listening may help firms to acquire strategic information; gain greater awareness of context for company decisions; and take input into consideration, even if they do not necessarily comply (Trapp 2014). Accuracy and comprehension are most important for understanding and acting on the information received.

Where response-giving is seen as a necessary step following listening, anticipated outcomes begin to incorporate more relational benefits. There is still talk of advantages to the firm, and of having proactive public communication and image creation, but trust and relationship-building also enter the equation. Interactive communication and enhanced understanding allow firms to stay “in front of emerging issues” and respond proactively (Brunner 2008, p. 74). Other benefits of listening as identified by Brunner (2008) include increased understanding, sensitivity, and tolerance; business



success; improved relationships, morale, productivity and goal achievement; and gaining the trust of communication partners.

Where response-giving is seen as an integral part of an exchange-based listening process, anticipated outcomes are most focused on relational benefits and collaborative goals. Morsing and Schultz (2006) outline multiple levels of communication (a)symmetry between firms and other stakeholders. In two-way asymmetric communication, firms merely perceive feedback “in terms of finding out what the public will accept and tolerate” (p. 327). But in two-way symmetrical stakeholder communication, responses are made as an iterative and joint sense-making process. Building relationships is the focus of these efforts, which Morsing and Schultz describe as “establishing an ongoing and systematic interaction” with stakeholders (p. 328). Ramsey and Sohi (1997) likewise demonstrate that when salespeople are perceived to listen, customers place higher trust in them and show greater desire and anticipation for future interactions: expectations for a lasting relationship. Building and maintaining relationships is a significant outcome of listening due to the relational focus of stakeholder listening expectations (Burnside-Lawry 2012).

However, even these progressive perspectives on listening privilege the firm as having dominant goals or aims. As Grunig (2001, p. 13) argues, “the symmetrical model actually serves the self-interest of the organization better than an asymmetrical model.” Relationship-building outcomes are ideal from a firm’s perspective, if the firm wants a relationship with certain stakeholders. But what if certain stakeholders are hostile to firm objectives and do not *want* a relationship with the organization? The literature on listening in a marketing context prioritizes firm objectives. And it is not enough to look in isolation at any one organization’s immediate network of stakeholder relationships, when these exist in a broader context. It is important to consider dynamic co-evolution of behaviours and practices at multiple levels and foci of any complex, interconnected marketing system (Layton 2015).

### ***Conceptual Disagreements***

It is clear that listening is conceptualized in many different ways. This is especially evident from the work of Fontana, Cohen and Wolvin (2015), who qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed similarities and overlaps in 53 research scales used to measure listening. They assessed scales from many disciplines and contexts, careful to select ones that were not overly context-specific. But the most commonly seen traits were still entirely absent from a third of the scales or more. Some scales had absolutely zero overlap with the component traits found in some others. The authors tried, but were unable to make a categorical system for the scales they compared. All of this dissimilarity suggests, the authors say, that “researchers have different ideas as to what constitutes listening” (Fontana, Cohen and Wolvin 2015, p. 172).

Where are all these differences coming from? If researchers can examine the phenomenon of listening and produce such an eclectic assortment of measuring tools, this speaks poorly to either our understanding of listening or to its validity as a theoretical construct. I propose that researchers perceive listening differently across contexts and studies in part because their participants or research subjects do. Ramsey and Sohi (1997) emphasize that *perceived* listening is a high-order construct. In the context of salesperson relationships, Ramsey and Sohi give a framework for understanding not just how people listen, but how they actively *demonstrate* their listening through sensing, evaluating, and responding. Each is conveyed through behavioural cues which are interpreted by the second party in communication. I suggest that subjectivity of this interpretation makes for a large part of the confusion around listening as a concept.

Expectations for appropriate interaction, listening included, are shaped by the social mechanisms at play in any communication setting. Listening is perceived to have taken place according to whether listeners are meeting expectations for their behaviours in a given situation. But expectations, too, are subject to individual beliefs and interpretations. Nonetheless, expectations form a key part of how people interact with one another in any communication setting:

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The ways in which participants in an action field engage with each other are shaped by an overarching social and cultural environment and, perhaps more importantly, by **expectations** arising from the social mechanisms at work amongst field participants.

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(Layton 2015, p. 309)

Different situations give rise to different expectations. Expectations for listening behaviour, outcomes, and how these are visible can be vastly different according to different individuals and contexts. Expectations for good listening even differ by age cohort: Coakley, Halone and Wolvin (1996) offer a taxonomy called Qualities associated with the Effective Listener (QEL), which comprises 20 first-level grounded categories. Of these, certain qualities were more important to respondents of different age groups. For example, eye contact was especially important to elementary and university-aged respondents.

Context, too, is key. Burnside-Lawry (2012) used the above QEL taxonomy as a base and extended it with organization-relevant traits to be more applicable to stakeholder contexts. Newly-added qualities included, for example: being willing to change, prioritizing issues, running meetings appropriately, and having the right staff involved. Competent organizational listening, the author says, involves values and actions that serve the aims of accurate understanding and of giving support to the listener-stakeholder relationship (Burnside-Lawry 2012).

Organizations have goals to listen and be seen to listen (gather information, build relationships); they also have goals to be listened *to* (traditional communications, advertising, and public relations strategy). In any transformational, symmetrical stakeholder engagement practice, both of these goals are important. But listening and being listened to are often looked at separately, and each is most often researched from a firm-centred perspective. Inherent in this is an imbalance of power, where large organizations leverage capital and other resources in order to realise their communication goals while other, less powerful stakeholders have fewer means to achieve their own objectives.

### ***Gaps of Opportunity***

Large organizations do have an important role to play. From their positions of power, the resources they employ can do much to improve communication interactions. Appropriate corporate culture, venues, and procedures are important antecedents to creating the *context* for effective listening interaction (Burnside-Lawry 2012). But even when they are derived from research on stakeholder expectations, lists of “effective listener” requirements or checklists can reinforce an asymmetrical communications model. These treat listening as an action rather than as an interaction—treat it as a performance that is enacted by firms and other large organizations. Instead—in any relationship that is truly transformational or symmetrical—whether listening has even *occurred* is a question that ought to be collaboratively approached.

We need understanding that is more universal and more adaptable than current, CSR- and image-based asymmetrical concepts of listening. We need something akin to stakeholder network theory

that integrates a complex understanding of listening relationships between all types of stakeholders. Coakley, Halone and Wolvin (1996), for example, call for further investigation into sender- and receiver-based expectations for effective listening. The current research answers this call for research with qualitative exploration. By taking a network perspective and treating listening as subjective *interaction*, this research investigates listening experiences and expectations from all viewpoints in a dynamic stakeholder engagement context. The new theory of listening is highly compatible with system-wide approaches to marketing systems analysis.

## **2.3 Gender Considerations**

Science and technology industries often frame public opposition as emotional or irrational, but doing so may harm rather than build relationships. For controversial technologies such as nuclear power, industry experts often espouse the “deficit model” of public attitudes which theorises that public skepticism towards technology is caused by a lack of scientific knowledge (Sturgis and Allum 2004).

These situations are complicated by opinions which differ along gender lines. With regards to nuclear energy, research in Saskatchewan has confirmed that women are more likely than men to oppose nuclear power; are more likely to report feeling that information about nuclear topics is difficult to understand; and are less likely to trust university scientists, government regulators, and elected officials as credible sources for this information (Berdahl, Bell, Bourassa and Fried 2014; Bourassa, Bell, Berdahl and Fried 2014). But this gender difference is not well-understood. Contradicting the deficit model’s assumptions, male and female physical scientists still perceive nuclear risk differently (Barke, Jenkins-Smith and Slovic 1997). This reveals that the deficit model undervalues and simplifies women’s diverse experiences and carries the risk of further marginalising less empowered groups.

An expert in risk analysis, Paul Slovic (1999) argues that many psychosocial factors influence public perceptions of risky technology, including gender, and that these cannot be explained away by educational or knowledge deficits. Slovic and others (Cass and Walker 2009; Slovic 1999) have called for increased industry respect of diverse social values and warn against dismissing public concerns by framing them as emotional or irrational. To facilitate the understanding and respect needed for meaningful two-way communication (Kent and Taylor 2002) between all stakeholders—women included—on nuclear topics, women’s experiences and values must instead be considered from the diverse perspectives of women themselves.

### ***Women’s Perspectives***

When selecting a segment of the population, we chose to interview women because these voices are under-represented and often marginalized in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) industries. If we are to advocate for individualistic, transformative models of community engagement, particular attention needs to be taken to balance the scales of institutional power and work to understand needs and concerns of all stakeholders. In this light, we approached our research from a feminist perspective.

This should not be taken to mean that women are the way(s) described by this study while men are not; conversely, it showcases the wide range of attitudes and experiences of women themselves. But we did think that women might show a greater diversity of opinion that would make it easier for us to seek out a wide range of perspectives on such a controversial stakeholder issue. Gender

is just one dimension of social power imbalance, and an inter-sectional perspective on this would expect it to interact with other pieces of a person's experiences or identity.

Rather than being dismissed, ideas of co-operation, respect, fairness, and sensitivity should be incorporated into industry-public communications efforts. In fact, some researchers have even cast these as intrinsically feminist values which can improve ethical practice in public relations (Grunig, Toth and Hon 2000). In this light, interaction, dialogue and communication around nuclear topics represents an important area for understanding women's unique and diverse experiences. Such knowledge would benefit mutual understanding and collaborative efforts for all who are part of industries, governments, and communities.

### 3. Methods

My investigative process employed Grounded Theory (GT), a well-established qualitative approach. Grounded Theory is well-suited to complex situations and is especially useful “when a theory is needed to explain how people are conceptualizing and experiencing a phenomenon” (Johnson and Sohi 2016). This was the case for my phenomenon of interest: listening.

Grounded Theory approaches, however, can be difficult to employ and to describe. Braun and Clarke (2006) recognize that there are several ways that grounded theory is conceptualized and practiced. My own approach to grounded theory is constructivist and interpretive (Charmaz 2006). The aim of this section is to give a detailed account of my approach and methods used, in order to give greatest transparency to the process of constructing my novel framework.

#### 3.1 Grounded Theory

##### *Research Outcomes*

Grounded Theory might be best distinguished by its outcomes or aims. It has been called a “discovery-oriented” research methodology (Beverland, Wilner and Micheli 2015; Hollmann, Jarvis and Bitner 2015). The phrase “grounded theory” refers to both the method itself and the eventual result. The aim of GT is to identify patterns and propose explanations of complex relationships in order to generate new theoretical understanding (Cederlund 2014).

The desired outcome of my study is to put forward a new framework for how we might understand (non)-listening in stakeholder engagement. This desired outcome could be better called “understanding” rather than “knowledge”.

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Rather than contributing verified knowledge, I see grounded theorists as offering plausible accounts.

(Charmaz, 2006 p. 132)

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Understanding stakeholder experiences of listening is *interdependent* on understanding stakeholders’ varied conceptualizations of listening itself. How people experience listening will depend largely on how they themselves understand it, and the phenomenon cannot be well-described independently of participant perspectives. Appropriate for this situation, GT methods allow the researcher to explore a situation, discover determinants and outcomes, and understand participants’ thought processes.

##### *Grounded Theory and Phenomenology*

Grounded Theory and phenomenology have a number of similarities; Cederlund (2014) classifies both under *depiction of interdependence*: research methods that employ “disciplined imagination” to make sense of complex relationships. I incorporated a phenomenological paradigm for gathering and making sense of interview data. In this study, phenomenology mainly informs the interview-

based approach, the structure of those interviews, and the approach taken to learn and understand participant experiences.

There is precedent for this combination. For example, Signori, Flint and Golicic (2015) employ GT with phenomenology to enable “a deep interpretation of environments from the perspectives of individuals” (p. 541). They use phenomenology to first describe the “lived meaning” of participants’ experiences, and then GT interpretation to explore the interrelations between categories, change, conditions, and outcomes. Similarly, Chaker et al. (2016) identify the aim of phenomenology as “describing what it is like to experience [thing]” and GT’s aim as developing a theoretical structure for understanding that thing, bottom-up, through “sense-making” of the data. Both of these goals are possible, harmoniously, in qualitative research.

### ***Guidance for Methods Used***

Coding and analysis of GT research can employ a versatile assortment of tools and strategies. Certain grounded theory researchers prescribe very specific process steps; others advocate for a more flexible approach. For my part, I used a wide variety of methodological tools but kept close attention to conceptual rigor.

Drawing from the work of Glaser and Strauss, Charmaz (2006) summarizes the following list of necessary research components for developing grounded theory:

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#### **Defining Components of Grounded Theory Practice**

- Simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis
- Constructing analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses
- Using the constant comparative method, which involves making comparisons during each stage of the analysis
- Advancing theory development during each step of data collection and analysis
- Memo-writing to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps
- Sampling aimed toward theory construction, not for population representativeness
- Conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis.

(Charmaz, 2006, pp. 5-6)

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For my part, I closely followed Charmaz’ guidance on methodological steps and kept these necessary components prioritized during my analytical process. I also leaned heavily on the work of Corbin and Strauss, who propose seven criteria or questions for evaluating grounded theory research (Corbin and Strauss 1990) and for describing a complex coding procedure. I endeavor to account for each of those questions within the explanations of my methods process here.

In the sections that follow, I describe my step-by-step process of interview data collection; coding and analysis; and last of all theory integration. Most importantly, I strive to identify which tools I use, how they were used, and my reasons for using them. I do this with reference to literature on grounded theory and qualitative analysis throughout (e.g. Charmaz 2006; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Goulding 2005; Spiggle 1994; Strauss and Corbin 1998).

### *Use of Literature*

One point of confusion for grounded theory is the timing and purpose of using literature review. This section will clarify how and when literature was used to inform emergent theory in the study. Some authors claim that researchers should avoid *all* knowledge of existing theory or literature until after data analysis is complete, thus creating theory that is grounded in the data and *only* in the data. Goulding (2005) argues against this requirement, calling it “a common misconception” of grounded theory (p. 296). No researcher can ever begin as an entirely blank slate.

To generate new theory, however, it is still essential to remain open to various interpretations, and not box oneself into already-developed theories when exploring and making sense of new data. Because of this, Goulding (2005) counsels researchers who use grounded theory to enter their chosen field and begin collecting data without delay. It is critical, she says, not to exhaust the literature before data collection starts. But gaining awareness of existing theories can be very informative to data analysis, especially as one’s research moves further along.

For the current study, data collection began right away, and literature review was driven by the data. Literature search (on listening theory) proceeded concurrently with coding and analysis. It was conducted as grounds for comparison with the data, not as preconceived boxes to sort the data into. A variety of listening theory from literature offered many opportunities for comparison and avoided the risk of becoming entrenched in one or more pre-existing theories.

## **3.2 Participants and Interview Format**

### *Participants*

Participants were 18 adult women in or near Saskatchewan who had experienced engagement—defined here as interaction with other individuals or organisations—within the context of nuclear topics. Such topics included: nuclear medicine, uranium mining, disposal of used nuclear fuel (waste), the construction or continued use of nuclear power generation, and siting or feasibility studies for either power plants or waste disposal.

Confidentiality was an important ethical concern in this study. Especially because of conflict around nuclear issues, some participants' work, community, or personal relationships could be adversely affected if experiences shared in interviews were to make them publicly identifiable. To maintain privacy, all names of people, places, and organizations have been removed from quotes used in this document. Quotes from interviews are labeled using participant numbers only, and a pseudonym is used when one case is discussed in section 4.6.

A variety of perspectives were represented by our sample. Participant ages were diverse, with the youngest being 19 and the oldest, retirees. Several participants were indigenous. Participants held a wide range of roles and affiliations related to their engagement with nuclear topics, and many had been involved with these issues for years through their community or career. The sample included community members, volunteers, industry employees at a local and corporate level, and women with roles in education, media, and local government. Participants were from multiple regions of Saskatchewan, including a mix of urban centre (South) locations and smaller towns in rural areas (North). To protect confidentiality, age and exact details of participant location and occupation are not reported, but a table of generalized participant demographics can be found in Appendix A.

Varied opinions on nuclear topics were well-represented. Within our sample there were some who strongly supported nuclear development, some who strongly opposed it, and a diverse range of viewpoints in-between. Where background knowledge about any participant's role(s) or viewpoint offers necessary context for understanding a quote, that information is given in the surrounding paragraphs. In the remaining parts of this section I will describe the selection and recruitment procedures, details of the interview format, and challenges we encountered.

### ***Selection and Recruitment***

Data collection for my thesis was carried out as part of a larger, interdisciplinary research project. This project was approved by the Behavioural Ethics Research Board at the University of Saskatchewan (see Appendix B). I worked with a team of researchers to recruit participants and conduct interviews. The interview format and questions were jointly created so as to serve the research aims of multiple researchers involved with the project. I participated as an interviewer in all eighteen interviews that were analysed for the current thesis.

Participants were recruited through a combination of networking, cold contacts and snowball sampling. Most participants were previously unknown to any of the researchers. Initial contact was made by phone or email (see Appendix C for a sample email). To prospective participants, I explained that we were hoping to hear from Saskatchewan women who had encountered conversations about nuclear energy or uranium mining. I clarified that employment in the nuclear sector was *not* required to participate, and that the relevant conversations could have been with friends or family, at work, or in the community.

To ensure that prospective participants met the inclusion criteria, I asked directly, for example: "do topics relating to nuclear ever come up in conversations you have with others?" Brief discussion allowed me to determine connections or contexts where someone was (or had been) engaged with nuclear topics. If a person met these criteria and expressed interest in an interview, they received a detailed information letter (see Appendix D) and consent form (Appendix E). Each interview participant received a \$50 honorarium in recognition of their time.

### ***Interview Format***

In semi-structured, conversational interviews, participants were asked to describe past conversations related to nuclear topics. Interviews lasted approximately one hour. Sixteen interviews were conducted in person and two interviews were conducted by phone. I was present at each interview, sometimes with other researchers and sometimes alone. To help each interview proceed smoothly—especially when multiple researchers were present—we followed a flexible but pre-set interview guide (see Appendix F for an anonymized example). I and my colleagues reviewed this guide before each interview, personalizing the questions and prompts or making adjustments as needed. The next paragraphs will elaborate on the interview format, approach, and questions used.

We first asked each participant about the contexts and situations where they discussed or were otherwise engaged with topics or organizations related to nuclear. Participants also shared information about their backgrounds: work and personal history, family relationships, social ties, and other details. This information helped us see each stakeholder's experiences in the particular context and circumstances unique to them.

Participants were asked to recall, if they could, memorable conversations or interactions that they had observed or taken part in. This served to direct focus to specific experiences (as opposed to



abstract generalizations). Interview questions were primarily open ended or clarification-based; we sought to get a picture of events as seen from that person's perspective. Interview participants described interactions they had seen or experienced in a variety of formal and informal settings: at work, public hearings, committee meetings, with friends and family, or on social media. We often prompted participants by asking if they could recall an interaction that was particularly positive or particularly negative; that they felt was successful or felt was unsuccessful. We left these definitions open: we wished to explore participants' implicit understanding of what "successful" or "positive" interactions would mean to them.

Follow up questions sought to better understand how participants understood the concepts and vocabulary they used. For example, if a participant described someone's communication as "respectful" we asked things like: "How did they act?" "What sorts of things did they say?" If a participant said certain people had not listened, we asked them to describe the signs that showed this. If a participant described some people as open-minded and others as close-minded, we might ask the participant to compare how each would react in communication situations. We might also ask the participant to describe other points of view, thus learning *their* perceptions of the knowledge, reasoning, motivations, goals, and values held by others.

### **Challenges**

The controversy surrounding nuclear policy in Saskatchewan is such that even the academic sector is regarded with suspicion by some stakeholders. Given that funding and research partnerships do exist between universities, government, and private corporations, not everyone trusts researchers to be impartial.

Some contacts declined interviews because of this: they felt that contributing to knowledge about stakeholder relations in this sector would run counter to their own objectives. Those who declined for this reason were opposed to the nuclear and uranium mining industries.

I affirm that this research project was independently carried out. However, I also acknowledge the tensions that exist between certain stakeholders, especially considering the historical legacy of First Nations' treatment by our country's government. I respect each person's right to assert their choice when participating in research.

If mine was a *quantitative* study, this selective disinterest to participate might have posed a greater problem. But the qualitative nature of my research helps to mitigate the influence of a self-selection bias. I and my colleagues were able to arrange interviews with several people opposed to the nuclear sector, and no particular demographic was left out. While I regret that my findings could not also be informed by certain voices, I worked within these constraints to obtain, I hope, new insights on the nature of listening in stakeholder engagement over contested industries as understood by Saskatchewan women.

Another challenge was the remote location of many prospective and actual participants. The research team made trips to some smaller towns in Saskatchewan's North, but some interview participants lived in even more remote areas. I was obliged to hold some interviews over the phone to accommodate this.

### **3.3 Coding and Analysis**

Interview sessions were audio recorded and then transcribed, yielding over 500 pages of text for analysis. Assistive software (NVivo) was used to aid the coding process in its early stages. This

enabled me to code and annotate hundreds of large, small, and even overlapping excerpts while preserving an easy way to review these later in their original context.

### ***Open Coding***

As per Corbin and Strauss (1990), data analysis in Grounded Theory research should begin early and proceed concurrently with data collection. My data analysis began as soon as several interviews had been conducted and transcribed. I approached these transcripts with an open attitude, keeping in mind the foremost question of grounded theory analysis: “What is happening here?” (Charmaz 2006). Initial steps used the grounded theory methods of categorization (Spiggle 1994), open coding and line-by-line analysis (Goulding 2005). Staying open to new interpretations was important to develop new theory that would be grounded in the data rather than imposing fit onto it.

At this early stage, I actually expected that my thesis might focus on experiences and perceptions of *empathy*. I kept an open mindset, however, and annotated interview transcripts line-by-line with short memos and open codes. After just a few transcripts analysed in this way, something was obvious: empathy was not evident in the data as a prominent, grounded theme or category. Almost anything I found that could be related to empathy would have been imposing my *own* understanding of that concept onto participants' experiences.

By contrast, participant experiences of *listening and being listened to* (or not) featured very prominently in interviews. This was evident in the direct language used by participants (“listen”, “listening” and related words) and also indirectly in participant descriptions of communication events. Sometimes there were even multiple perspectives on a single incident. From integrating multiple accounts, analysis of these interviews could offer rich information on listening and non-listening as experienced by stakeholders.

### ***Choosing a Core Category***

With listening established as an emergent theme across our initial interviews, I refined my focus for further analysis. Listening offered paths of exploration for research questions on how listening is variously experienced and understood by stakeholders. Grounded theory methods used here include abstraction (Spiggle 1994) and identifying a core category (Corbin and Strauss 1990). To answer Corbin and Strauss’ questions, this core category of listening was arrived at quickly and early in analysis. This early identification allowed refinement of the main research question for my thesis:

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## **Research Question**

*How is listening understood and experienced in a controversial stakeholder engagement context?*

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The next steps of axial coding were highly important; they were necessary for dimensionalization (Spiggle 1994) of the (non)-listening construct. With these steps I began to identify relationships to form the basis of new grounded theory.

### ***Axial (Selective) Coding***

In my next steps of analysis, I broadly coded hundreds of new interview segments as relevant to listening and/or **non**-listening. I continued to ask, “What is happening here?” when considering

data, but also asked “is it relevant or related to listening?” This kept the research question well-prioritized in order to identify relevant portions of interview transcripts.

Following identification of some relevant text, I next asked “**How is this relevant to listening?**” As I went, I annotated with codes and memos to begin to make visible any connections and relationships (Table 3.1). I coded all new interviews in this way, and also revisited the earlier transcripts from interviews I had already analysed.

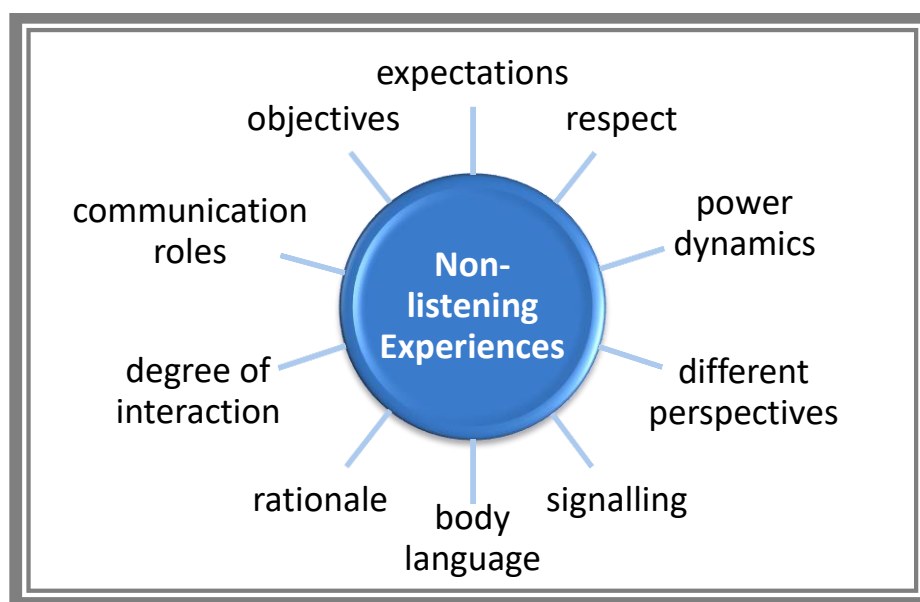
TABLE 3.1 – SHORTHAND CODES USED TO ANNOTATE DATA

<b>B</b> (Before)	things that come <b>before</b> listening/non-listening <i>...prevents Listening ...facilitates Listening ...leads to Listening</i>
<b>O</b> (Outcomes)	things that come <b>after</b> listening/non-listening <i>...outcome of Listening ...reaction to (non-)Listening</i>
<b>C</b> (Characteristics)	of listening/non-listening <i>...is (not) part of Listening ...demonstrates Listening ...is (not) necessary for Listening ...is a type of Listening ...normative ideas about Listening</i>
<b>R</b> (Related)	concepts or ideas that are associated with or connected to listening <i>...related to Listening ...influences/changes Listening ...includes Listening ...is shown/accomplished by Listening</i>
<b>E</b> (Examples)	listening or non-listening events, seen as an observer or participant <i>...disagreement about Listening ...example of (non) Listening ...experiences of Listening ...divergent perspectives of Listening events</i>
<b>A</b> (Actors)	the people or entities who take different roles in a listening dynamic <i>Listeners   Listenees (a.k.a. “speakers”)   Observers</i>

Using assistive NVivo software, I compiled two comprehensive sets of coded interview excerpts, one focused on listening interactions and one on *non*-listening interactions. There was some overlap between sets. For interest of what would be learned from barriers and failures to listen, I focused my attention primarily on the set of excerpts I had coded as **non**-listening.

With the help of this semi-structured coding, I began to identify certain key dimensions of different communication interactions as seen by stakeholders (Figure 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1 – AXIAL CODING MODEL, INTERMEDIATE STAGE IN DATA ANALYSIS



Grounded theory methods used here include dimensionalization, iteration, and abstraction (Spiggle 1994), focused coding (Charmaz 2006), and axial coding (Goulding 2005; Strauss and Corbin 1998). Here, axial coding was used as a *tool* for abstraction in the intermediate stages of analysis. I did not stop here and call this my model; instead, it became a valuable comparative tool in my next steps, as I began to construct categories from these earlier codes and integrate them within a broader framework.

### ***Memo-Writing***

I employed long form memo-writing to explore, compare, and uncover broad patterns. In free-form writing sessions, I put pen to paper for dozens of writing prompts. I maintained a list of ideas for these prompts and added to it often. Prompts included, for example:

- interesting data excerpts or events from coding
- provisional categories and their axial dimensions
- points of similarity or difference between categories or codes
- questions raised from previous freewriting sessions
- ideas that lacked clarity or seemed unexplored

Grounded theory methods used here include memo-writing (Charmaz 2006) and operations of comparison, integration, iteration, and refutation (Spiggle 1994). More than any other step in analysis, my long-form memos were essential to constructing, revisiting and refining provisional categories. The process allowed me to capture broad concepts from the data along with specific examples that form the basis of well-grounded theory. My memos yielded many pages of written text which provided the basis for the findings and analysis section of this paper.

### ***Constant Comparison***

During analysis, I iteratively went back to compare earlier data with more developed codes and categories. I re-visited, for example, “non-listening” coded sections that had already been explored

and annotated in my earliest stages. I often returned to full transcripts themselves to glean more examples and review the relevance of situational context. I extended my literature search, looking for additional ideas connected to concepts of listening. Exploring other ways that listening has been conceptualized allowed me to bring attention to additional elements in my own data. It also helped me find existing descriptive terms for elements I had taken note of (e.g. “speech conditions” as used in Burnside-Lawry, 2012).

Grounded theory methods used here include comparison and iteration (Spiggle 1994) known as the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967); and theoretical sampling (Charmaz 2006). This cyclical process ensured that the emergent model was able to portray an in-depth analysis of all data and reach theoretical saturation.

### ***Mind-Mapping and Verification***

I used visualization strategies to integrate ideas from long-form memos into a larger theoretical framework. Diagramming and mind-mapping were key tools I used throughout and increasingly towards the end of the analysis process. As an example, Appendix G shows an early visualization and arrangement of the six types, created before my model of listening interaction was complete. Verification was also a key part of this; I shared successive iterations of my category and framework visualizations with other researchers in my project team, in my thesis committee, and who attended my talks at three conferences. From them I obtained feedback and further insight on weaknesses and opportunities present in early versions of my framework. Additional free-written memos allowed me to capture and elaborate on my responses to this feedback.

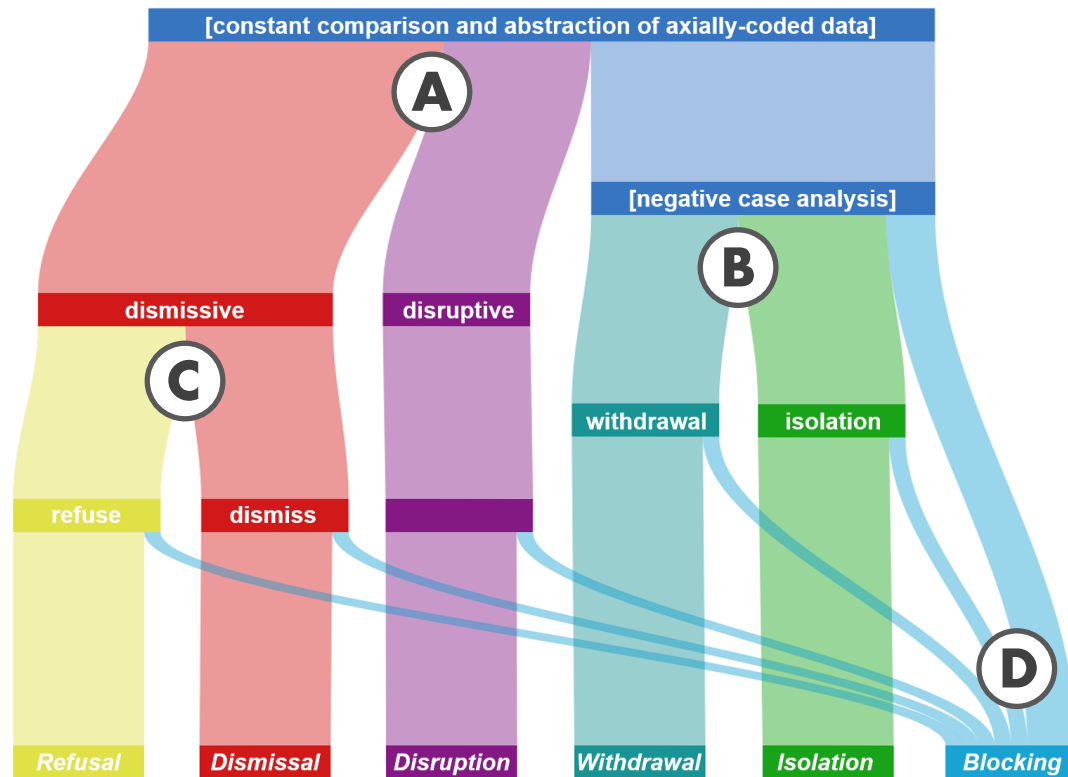
Grounded theory methods used here include integration, abstraction, and refutation (Spiggle 1994). Crafting and verifying visualizations of the concepts from my research allowed integration of my non-listening categories into a big picture understanding of how they relate to one another. Taken together, the full framework offers more complete insight on the breadth of non-listening interactions found in stakeholder relations. In the next subsections, I recount the step by step results of my approach to theory integration.

## **3.4 Theory Integration**

### ***Emergent Themes***

I constructed categories from the data using an iterative process of abstraction: I compared attributes of diverse experiences, teasing out their similarities and differences in ways that helped to define new categories. I used constant comparison to refine, clarify and redraw boundaries around these categories as new ones took form. My step-by-step process can be visualized as a flow diagram (Figure 3.2). Below, I give an overview of this iterative process.

FIGURE 3.2 – DISTILLATION OF CATEGORIES FROM DATA



**A** The earliest stages of comparison revealed a contrast between more dismissive and more disruptive cases of non-listening. These two patterns were broad, yet distinct. They show clear differences in levels of overt aggression and have opposing sender-receiver power differentials (bottom-up versus top-down).

**B** I expanded this early model after critically examining how the initial categories fit the data. Using negative case analysis, I identified many cases of perceived lack-of-listening that did not clearly fit as either *Dismissal* or *Disruption*. Many of these coded passages described very low engagement. Instead, non-listening was shown by passive reactions only, or by no interaction at all. Teasing out differences among these examples led me to split them across two new non-listening categories: *Withdrawal* (a response) and *Isolation* (an initial state).

**C** The emergent *Dismissal* category was very broad at first and needed to be refined through further analysis. I observed that portrayals of the interactions in this category were very perspective-dependent. Examining these, I drew comparisons between cases wherein people *felt* or did not feel *dismissed* versus where they described *themselves* as dismissing (or listening to) others' messages. These comparisons crystallized differences between *Dismissal* and mere *Refusal*, establishing these as distinct concepts or perceived patterns of non-listening.

**D** Through iterative comparison I ensured that emergent concepts were differentiated from one another and self-consistent. As I compared individual cases to their respective categories, I paid special attention to exceptionalities, extremes, and outliers. Cases across several categories had features that drew my attention. I examined:

- large power imbalances in *Dismissal* interactions
- the consequences of “effective” *Disruption* tactics

- various degrees of *Isolation*, and causal factors in *Isolation* events
- how “withdrawing” from a **sender** role differs from *Withdrawal* as a message **receiver**

Careful examination of these cases helped to identify properties of a final conceptual pattern: *Blocking*. Taken together, the identified patterns form the basis for a new theoretical model. This model recognizes six patterns or types of non-listening interaction:

Refusal	Dismissal	Withdrawal	Isolation	Blocking	Disruption
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### *Choosing Category Labels*

During my iterative efforts to distill these categories, I wrestled more than once with the question of how to label them. Was it a better fit to call the first pattern “refusal”, or “refusing?” For the third pattern, “withdrawal” or “withdrawing?” And so forth.

Grounded theory researchers place emphasis on *action* as the basis for theoretical insights obtained using grounded methods (Charmaz 2006). With a mind to help keep attention on processes of action during the analysis stage, Charmaz strongly encourages the use of gerunds—words that end in “-ing”—to label emergent categories.

I gave careful thought to this guidance. Indeed, at the outset and at various times during my analysis, I intuitively thought about most categories using their gerund forms (e.g. *Refusing*, *Dismissing*, *Withdrawing*, etc.). But as I refined each category, some of these labels became less consistently appropriate within my emergent framework.

- *Refusal* and *Dismissal* in my model are intended to reflect different interpretations of a situation and the thoughts, actions, and intent of a message receiver. Such interpretations may be made by a receiver **or** sender **or** onlooker. As categories, they are best understood as perspective-dependent, interpretive labels of sender-receiver *interaction*. Labels like “refusing” and “dismissing” mislead by seeming to categorize actions themselves.
- *Isolation* describes an interactive state. It *can* come about through deliberate action or inaction; it can also occur by happenstance. The gerund word form, “isolating”, places far too much emphasis on the idea of a specific actor and action(s) to be reflective of this category’s full breadth. This became especially clear as my analysis neared completion.
- The *Withdrawal* pattern does focus on specific actions. This afforded more flexibility for label choice. It describes a non-listening response by a message receiver who withdraws or retreats. In the end, I chose the noun “withdrawal” for consistency alongside *Isolation* and *Dismissal*, its two neighbouring categories. The gerund form, “withdrawing”, would also have been a conceptual match for what this pattern represents.
- *Blocking* was the only label I kept in gerund form. Cases in this category fall on a spectrum, with emphasis on blocking actions of specific actors at one end, and the other end focused more on the blocking influence of contextual conditions. Despite being a gerund, “blocking” seemed suitable to describe the category’s full range. Noun-only related words like “blockage” seemed poorly descriptive—with connotations altogether *too* distant from either action or *interaction*.

### *Framework Integration*

As analysis moved towards completion, I continued to compare my categories and experiment with diagrams to visualize the relationships between different patterns of non-listening. I noted

early on that my categories of non-listening types varied by the degree of interactivity present. *Withdrawal* and *Isolation* were low-interactivity, whereas *Dismissal* and *Refusal* were high. But it was not until very late in my analysis that I fully grasped how all six categories or types could be sequentially represented.

Using a flow diagram, I mapped each of five non-listening types to different sequential stages in a listening process of message transmission and acceptance. At first, my *Disruption* category was an outlier that fell out of sequence in this visualization. My framework lacked full integration because the connections between *Disruption* and other non-listening types were not yet clear. I needed to re-engage with the data to pursue more complete understanding; this final step of comparisons was a form of theoretical sampling (Charmaz 2006).

Returning to the data, I re-examined non-listening events that I had coded as *Disruption* interactions. I looked at what was happening during these events and especially their effects on other communication dyads. Here I realized that the *Disruption* category could be represented with a perpendicular alignment to three other listening stages which it influenced or interfered with. With this new set of relationships, my theoretical model now offered a fuller, more integrated understanding of all non-listening interactions.

### ***A New Non-Listening Framework***

Section 4, Findings and Analysis, will provide a detailed account of the entire theoretical model. Subsection 4.1 begins with an overview of how the model conceptualizes listening and how the typology of six non-listening interactions in this model should be understood. A flow diagram depicts the positions of each non-listening barrier along sequential stages of a listening process. Next, subsections 4.2 through 4.7 offer in-depth exploration of each non-listening pattern or type. Descriptions of each type are grounded in interview data and supported by direct quotes from participants throughout.



## 4. Findings and Analysis

This section explains a new interpersonal theory of non-listening. Perceived listening and non-listening are key to understanding stakeholder interactions and controversy. Drawing on in-depth research findings from first-hand stakeholder experiences, this theory aims to explain patterns of interaction in stakeholder engagement that *prevent* listening or signal a lack thereof.

### 4.1 Overview of New Framework

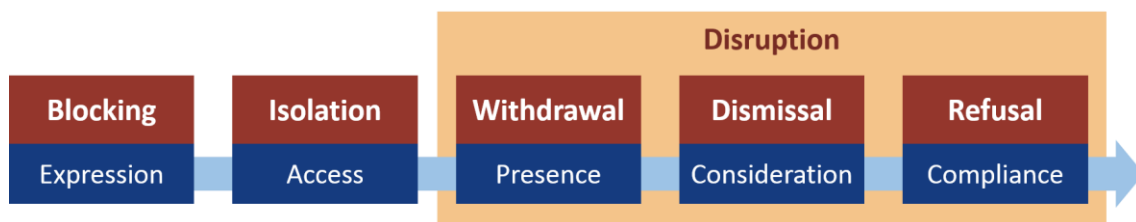
**This theory describes listening as a process capturing the extent of message transmission and acceptance between a sender and receiver.** Under this theory, listening interactions include various stages (Figure 4.1). Depending on a stakeholder's perspective and individual concept of listening requirements, not all may be necessary. However, an *unambiguous* listening interaction does include every stage: a sender is able to **express** a message with **access** to an audience; the listener is willingly **present** for the interaction, **considers** message content, and **complies** by changing beliefs or behaviour.

FIGURE 4.1 – PATTERNS OF INTERACTION FOR LISTENING



**Non-listening events** emerge from patterns of interaction that inhibit message transmission or acceptance. This model includes six non-listening patterns: one direct counterpart to each stage of listening (Figure 4.2, red boxes) and a sixth that affects multiple stages. Patterns of **blocking** or **isolation** limit a message from being expressed or transmitted; patterns of **withdrawal**, **dismissal**, and **refusal** pose limits to message consideration and acceptance. The sixth and final non-listening type, **disruption**, aims to stop *others* from listening (Figure 4.2, orange box) by interfering to cause withdrawal, dismissal, and refusal in other listening dyads. These six patterns form the basis for a new theoretical model of perceived non-listening in controversial contexts.

FIGURE 4.2 – PATTERNS OF INTERACTION FOR LISTENING (BLUE) AND NON-LISTENING (RED, ORANGE)



Attributes of circumstance, scope, power dynamics, respect, and agreement are key features of the six non-listening patterns. For interactions positioned to the left along this continuum, it is less

likely for *anyone* involved to assert that listening has taken place. For interactions positioned towards the right side of the continuum, perceived listening becomes somewhat more likely.

In some ways, this new definition of listening relates to previous definitions and literature on the topic. By defining listening as a process of message transmission and acceptance occurring between a sender and receiver, the new definition offers a scope that is more comprehensive and network-focused. Some previous definitions of listening only included information gathering (Roper 2005; Trapp 2014), whereas other definitions included response-giving as an important part of the listening process (Brunner 2008; Castleberry and Shepherd 1993; Galanes and Brillhart 1997; Ramsey and Sohi 1997). The new definition incorporates both: successful message *transmission* encompasses the information transfer that is critical in one-directional models of listening; message acceptance, on the other hand, is conveyed through response-giving. Unlike most previous definitions, the new model does not treat listening as an action exclusive to message receivers; instead, it is an interactive process between senders and receivers. Another point of difference is that this new model of listening includes different stages. Instead of measuring the extent of listening with equally weighted checklist items, this model identifies six specific areas of focus where transmission and/or acceptance can be impeded during the course of communication events.

The summary that follows, as well as the main parts of the Findings and Analysis section, will each elaborate on these six patterns in reverse order from how they are shown in the diagram. Beginning at the end which is closest to (sometimes synonymous with) listening—*Refusal*—I will describe different types of situations where listening is prevented. Working from there, the order will continue with *Dismissal*, *Withdrawal*, *Isolation*, *Blocking*, and finally *Disruption*.

### ***Summary of Six Types***

A high-level overview of each interaction type is presented here. In the sections that follow, each type will be discussed in greater detail with supporting quotes from interviews.

In **refusal**, a message receiver hears a message and considers message content. However, the message sender may hold expectations for change (in attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour) which the receiver refuses to meet. The receiver gives a good-faith response, but stops short of actual **compliance** with these expectations.

In **dismissal**, a message receiver is present to receive a message. They give a response but engage only superficially; they do not give true **consideration** to message content, and they respond by disregarding or rejecting the message.

In **withdrawal**, a message receiver hears a message, but does not maintain **presence**. The message is expressed with mutual access, but the receiver chooses to assert power over self and withdraw. By doing this, they disengage from a listening role and terminate the interaction.

In **isolation**, dis-connectivity in a communication network prevents mutual **access** for sender-receiver communication. The sender expresses a message, but the message fails to reach a certain would-be receiver. No engagement is possible.

In **blocking**, a message is halted at its source. A would-be message sender feels a lack of control or autonomy; they are disempowered and held back from **expression**. The source

of the blocking force can range from external (threats, etc.) to internal (holding back in response to circumstances).

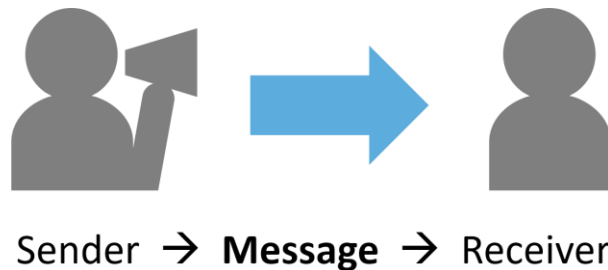
In **disruption**, communication between a sender and receiver is disrupted by a third party. Disruption aims to increase **withdrawal**, **dismissal**, and **refusal** by message receivers. The third party feels disempowered, and their actions are a power play: a desperate effort to wrest more control in a situation where they feel little or none.

### *Unit of Analysis*

This framework defines listening as an interactive phenomenon. It therefore examines listening within communication dyads, that is, sender-receiver pairs connected by messages in a network. The senders and receivers in these dyads may be individuals or organizations or groups. Even in group to group communication, however, listening and non-listening dynamics can be optionally examined at the individual level for a finer level of detail.

The framework treats communication as two-directional, but analyses listening separately in each direction. Non-listening patterns in this framework are identified and applied to unique sender-message-receiver arrangements (Figure 4.3). As communication flows both ways, senders become receivers and receivers become senders in turn. The directionality of the focal message determines which is which.

FIGURE 4.3 – SENDER-MESSAGE-RECEIVER UNIT OF ANALYSIS



### *Vocabulary*

Synonyms for message sender might include: speaker, communicator, or broadcaster. Synonyms for message receiver might include: listener or non-listener, recipient, or audience. Many of these are situational. “Speaker”, for example, is not descriptive of situations with written messaging. In this paper I preferentially use sender and receiver as these are neutral terms.

### *Principles of Framework Application*

When examining a communication interaction through the lens of this new framework, keep in mind the following key principles:

#### **1 Subjectivity**

As a general trend, interactions further to the right along the listening continuum are more likely to be described as listening. However, people with different perspectives are very likely to characterize an event in different ways, and to apply different labels to the same interaction.

## 2 Non-Exclusivity

It is possible to apply more than one label to complex interactions. Elements of a communication event are sometimes well-described by more than one non-listening pattern in this model.

## 3 Concurrence

Real-world communication events involve many messages conveyed in multiple directions. One piece of dialogue may even contain multiple messages. Concurrent messages can be analysed individually; message to message, the same sender-receiver pair may yield different outcomes.

## 4 Exchange

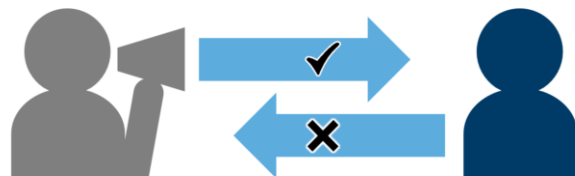
By altering the strategic action field, non-listening dynamics shape future interactions within a communication dyad. Often, multiple types of non-listening co-exist in escalation, where one form of non-listening emerges within a dialog *in response to* another non-listening type.

## 4.2 Refusal

In **refusal**, a message receiver hears a message and considers message content. However, the message sender may hold expectations for change (in attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour) which the receiver refuses to meet. The receiver gives a good-faith response, but stops short of actual **compliance** with these expectations.

Message senders versus receivers, or different people in different situations, do not always agree that this first category of non-listening even *counts* as non-listening. Refusal situations are very context- and perspective-dependent. These happen when someone's concept of listening would demand or expect a particular change (of knowledge, attitude, opinion, or behaviour) in the receiver of a message. In these situations, the receiver engages with the message's content. The content of the message—including any information, request, or directive—has been duly considered. But the extent of message consideration has stopped short of full compliance or acceptance. Instead, the receiver refuses to comply with the request or expectation for change (Figure 4.4).

FIGURE 4.4 – REFUSAL



Disagreement on whether “Refusal” has happened comes with differences in belief and opinion:

1. Whether compliance or change is a *reasonable* expectation (or obligation, even) of the message receiver.
2. Whether the receiver *has*, in fact, earnestly considered the message request in good faith. If true consideration is not given (i.e., if the refusal was predetermined or unavoidable), then the resulting interaction is seen by that person as “Dismissal” instead.

In this way, the categorization of Refusal versus Dismissal non-listening is entirely fluid and perceptual. For message receivers who want to be *seen* as effective listeners, a big part of this challenge is how others see their behaviour. Which actions convey refusal or dismissal? This is important for listeners to consider. They must ask: *how can I effectively convey the consideration that I give to each message when I hear it?*

Of all six non-listening patterns, Refusal was the only one ever—and only sometimes—associated with respect. Respect can be defined as a “behavioral manifestation of believing another person has value” (Grover 2013). Good faith efforts to give consideration to a message were described as respectful. From a message receiver viewpoint, willingness to consider a message was often sufficient to see *one’s own self* in a listening role. But from a message sender or onlooker viewpoint, more was usually required. Occasionally, knowing the reasons for refusal did help others to see a refusal interaction as respectful, and to characterize it as listening. Refusal to sign a petition, for example, was described positively when an explanation for the non-compliance was also given. [P11]

The scope of Refusal non-listening interaction is strictly between a message sender and receiver. (This applies to Dismissal and Withdrawal interactions, also.) Third parties are not directly involved, although they may have a unique assessment of the interaction. For Refusal, Dismissal, and Withdrawal, the one who is considered to “listen” or not is always a receiver; that is, they are

an *intended* target of the message. If there is more than one target, each “message vector” from a sender to a unique receiver can be considered and analyzed as a separate interaction.

### ***Expectations and Requests for Change***

What criteria for change must be met to prevent an outcome of Refusal? Benchmarks of “full” compliance or acceptance are subjective; viewpoints depend on the beliefs and expectations held by each message sender. A number of expectations for outcomes may be present when someone is communicating a message. This section will demonstrate a range of situation types wherein compliance is measured against different expectations for change. Refusal to meet those expectations demonstrates the Refusal interaction type. Discussed here are situations where:

1. A message sender’s primary objective is to provoke action
2. The message being conveyed *is* a specific request or directive
3. A message sender expects acceptance of new information
4. A sender anticipates that receivers will shift their attitudes or opinions

Whatever expectations are had for change or compliance, failure to meet these has implications for ongoing communication and relationship dynamics. When expectations are not met, this refusal can arouse frustration in message senders and make them less willing to listen in turn. For example, some message senders had expectations that the information they shared would be accepted as true or factual. These senders described feeling more and more frustrated when receivers refused to accept information. Others who made requests, or calls to action, felt consistently *not* listened to when others refused those requests and failed to act.

Often, other non-listening interactions developed in *response* to perceived refusal. Some who experienced refusal in a sender role responded in turn with Dismissive non-listening (section 4.3) and Disruptive non-listening (section 4.7) as message receivers. This escalation of non-listening on top of *more* non-listening can quickly complicate a situation that was already tense.

#### **1 Sender’s primary goal is to provoke substantive action**

The goals that people bring to an interaction shape their expectations. Sometimes a message sender has an all-encompassing objective to force action or other behaviour change. They may convey secondary messages in their interactions that do not explicitly target these main requests. Yet each message may be underscored with the same overarching expectation. In these quotes, message senders expected others to change their behaviour—this was their primary goal:

---

[They] may have really felt totally shut down and not listened to. And when you feel that way, you react more strongly. But I don’t think anything short of saying “okay, we’re packing our bags and going home” would have had any effect. P8

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It was usually near the end of the meeting. She would make some loud remarks... she was angry. She felt like she wasn’t getting heard. **And they weren’t listening to her and they weren’t stopping the procedure.** P4

---

In these cases, a sender’s concept of listening may include resolution of this primary goal as an *absolute requirement*. Any other outcome—in response to any message—was meaningless. Even if receivers considered a message’s content, those who refused to change their behaviour were invariably seen as refusing to listen.

## 2 Message contains a specific request or directive

Sometimes, the message itself *is* simply a directive or request. In these cases, an expectation for change is self-evident, and refusal to comply is almost inevitably seen as non-listening. There are exceptions; if refusal takes place in a broader, two-way conversation where mutual understanding—if not agreement—is reached, a sender may yet feel they have been listened to.

For examples of refused requests seen as non-listening, consider the quotes below. Each shows a situation where a message was specifically phrased as a request or directive, and a message receiver refused to comply. In the first example, a participant describes a directive in meetings that was not always followed; in the second, another participant relates an experience with her manager at work. In each case, the resulting interaction is described as non-listening.

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We had to say, “The questions will only be answered by the chair; none of the committee can speak unless the chair gives you the floor.” But that doesn’t mean everybody listens. P5

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She didn’t listen... I sent her an email: “You’ve got to stop badgering these communities that you’re continuously asking me to call. They never return my call. Just leave them alone now.” But she was adamant on me calling them, even though they wouldn’t. P9

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## 3 Expected acceptance of new information

Sometimes, the expected change was accepting new information as true, accurate or relevant. One participant described her frustration with certain groups, expressing that she respected their right to have an opinion, but was bothered by their rejection of new information. She felt that “if they would just accept *some* information” things could be different [P11]. Even without any expectation of overall *opinion* change on an issue, people may—like this participant—still hope for information acceptance and see this as an important facet of listening:

---

It’s complicated; it’s not black and white. But I *am* disappointed at people who won’t at least *listen* to information. You know: bring me a question. And we’ll find an answer for it. P11

---

Any paradigm that sees listening as “accepting versus refusing information”, however, implicates trust as a mandatory pre-requisite. Having trust can be defined as having confidence in the reliability and integrity of another person (Morgan and Hunt 1994). The possibility of anyone accepting information as true, or asking sincere questions of a message sender, presumes **trust in the validity and honesty of the answer** given. This necessary trust is not always present. As one participant relates:

---

When you say, “20 years ago we did things this way because we didn’t know any better. But today, this is absolutely not our standard,” people are not believing. They are not wanting to accept. And they keep going back to what was done 50 years ago. P3

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## 4 Sender anticipates a shift in attitude or opinion

Finally, sometimes the sender conveys their message or argument and hopes this will change someone’s attitude or opinions. Here is an interesting case from one participant’s perspective. For messages that they were *receiving*, this participant and her group conceptualized listening one way. They would hear and give consideration to senders’ concerns, and then offer a response addressing those concerns. But more than one concept of listening is evident here, and these are role-



dependent. The following quote suggests an asymmetric, inquirer-informant paradigm, where different criteria for “listening” are applied to communicators in different roles:

---

It was just that they *didn't even want to listen*... They could yell and yell and yell, and we would listen to their concerns because that's what we were there to do.

---

But if we tried to get a word in to try to calm those fears, or give an explanation, or give a reasoning, they would not hear us. There was no two-way communication [with them]. P10

---

The paradigm here is one of inquirer and informant, where the “informant” perspective reveals different expectations associated with listening versus being listened to. When giving a response, informants anticipated change: acceptance of their responding messages, different attitudes (“try to calm those fears”), or some degree of resolution. But this expectation was not met, and the informant point of view interpreted this as a refusal to comply; therefore, non-listening.

### ***Listening or Non-Listening?***

Opinions differed from person to person, and even situation to situation, on whether the act of listening *should* require someone to meet expectations of change (attitude, behaviour, opinion, etc.). Responses to a request or directive were generally characterized as non-listening if the request was refused. But especially for persuasive attempts, participants shared different expectations for whether others could or would change their minds about an issue through conversation. Take this example from a frustrated participant who felt not listened to:

---

It wouldn't matter even if they did stop and listen to me, because they had their minds set on more money, new jobs, bigger community. Our community wouldn't have grown! P6

---

Here the participant outlines how others were dismissing her, not bothering to ask or stick around to hear her reasoning. But she says that even if they *had* listened (*i.e.*, stay and hear her out) it wouldn't have mattered (*i.e.*, minds would not have changed). This suggests an interaction that would be characterised as Refusal, yet at the same time **not** classified as non-listening. According to this framing, non-listening can be regarded as separate from attitude change—determined before the chance to change opinion even occurs. Even listening, according to this participant's concept of it, did not mean anything would change as a result.

Descriptions of events that participants **did** label as “listening” tended to show greater levels of engagement with the content of a message, even if the message or request was ultimately refused. One participant described her process of reading and doubting a news article, but following up online to research additional sources and fact-check the article's information. While some information in the article was ultimately rejected as untrue, her process of considering that information and going through the effort of investigating it could be seen as engagement that separates a “refusal” response from a “dismissal” one:

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I'm online lots. And so what would happen is [the paper] would have an article. And I would look at it, and I'd read through it, and I'd go “yeahhh, no...” And I go online [to check] and: nope, that is not true. Nope, nope, nope, nope, nope... P7

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By contrast, a degree of openness to ideas was seen as missing in many non-listening situations. This same perceived openness often distinguished participant perceptions of dismissal responses



and refusal ones. Consider these quotes, which speak to examples that participants had variously characterized as failures to listen:

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Those who wanted to understand why the money was given, they would listen. And those who didn't made up their own stories in their head and decided to believe those. P1

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You won't change their mind because they've already made up their mind... so that's probably the biggest challenge, is being confronted by people who aren't actually reasonable and open to debate. P3

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### ***Refusal or Dismissal?***

We have seen that because of the multiple perspectives present in any situation, the “Refusal” pattern straddles characterizations of Listening and Non-Listening. We have likewise seen that Refusal shares a blurry and subjective boundary with the “Dismissal” pattern of interaction. A later section will discuss Dismissal non-listening in much greater detail. For now, the main thing to consider is that Refusal interactions refuse to comply with expectations for change, but still give consideration to message content. Dismissal interactions do not give this consideration. However, distinguishing between the two is subjective.

People often disagree on whether a message or request has been given fair consideration. From a message receiver's perspective, they may feel they were open-minded and gave things a fair shot before disagreeing, refuting, or otherwise giving a refusal response. But for the message sender, or for an onlooker, this consideration is an internal process that can't be seen directly. An observer or sender may instead feel (by their interpretation) that the receiver never gave things a fair chance, or that an outcome of refusal was predetermined. If this is the case, that person will see the interaction as Dismissal—and very likely as an example of non-listening.

With the benefit of internal perspective, people can be more generous in characterizing their own actions and intents as “listening” than they are of others'. Refusal-type interactions are still more likely than Dismissal interactions to be described as listening. When comparing message senders' and message receivers' perspectives, refusal and dismissal tend to pair with perceived (non-)listening in different ways. Table 4.1 summarizes these trends.

**TABLE 4.1 – DOMINANT CHARACTERIZATIONS OF REFUSAL & DISMISSAL INTERACTIONS**

	<b>receiver's perspective</b> <i>“Am I listening?”</i>	<b>sender's perspective</b> <i>“Am I being listened to?”</i>
perceived <b>Refusal</b>	I am listening (almost always)	I sometimes feel listened to; sometimes not
perceived <b>Dismissal</b>	I am sometimes listening; sometimes not	I do NOT feel listened to (almost always)

Even if a message receiver describes their own behaviour as refusal, they are still likely to say that they gave a listening response (top left). But when message senders perceive refusal from a receiver (top right), there is less consensus in characterizing these interactions as listening or not.

And if a message sender interprets someone's response as dismissive—they are almost certain to say this is not listening (bottom right).

From person to person and from situation to situation, this variance occurs according to different conceptualizations of listening. For a message sender whose expectation or hope for change is not met (refusal), feeling listened to can depend on details of the interaction and on *which* expected changes they associate with a concept of listening. And for a message receiver who deems a message unworthy of consideration (dismissal), listening intent depends on whether their own concept of listening is aligned with the response they give.

### ***Perceptions and Signalling***

Outward observations of Refusal or Dismissal depend on different factors than do evaluations of listening (or not). The ambiguity of listening or non-listening is influenced by individual concepts as well as situational expectations for what listening entails. But the ambiguity of categorizing interactions as Refusal rather than Dismissal is much more open-ended. Observer interpretations of Refusal are mainly a question of signalling. Signalling theory includes “the analysis of different types of signals that a signaler sends to the receiver and the situations in which they are interpreted and used” (Ching and Gerab 2017, p. 97). Situational and individual differences in signal interpretation can result in different perceptions of a communication interaction.

One participant tells about a time she shared information about a proposed project. Her explanation of 25-year project benefits to another community member earned this response:

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She said, “Oh, well, I don’t care. I won’t even be here by then.” p7

---

A response like this one can be interpreted in multiple ways. Was this Refusal: wherein a sender conveyed reasons for a project and the receiver considered the argument but refused to change her opinion, refuting the reasons given as not relevant to her? Or was it Dismissal: was “I don’t care” a sign of disregard, and should it be taken as a signal that all consideration of the sender’s argument was ignored?

This ambiguity of interpretation raises questions. If a message receiver honestly considers a message or request, *how* is this consideration signalled to others? What prior beliefs or contextual clues—including past interactions and behaviour—inform others’ evaluations of fair or unfair message evaluation? Relationship characteristics such as trust, perceived power, openness, and respect are sure to play a role. A later section focusing on Dismissal non-listening will touch on a number of these factors and on how dismissiveness may be conveyed.

Observer assessments of Refusal often included some element of *explanation* or probable cause. If people perceived that a sent message “didn’t go through,” they looked to explain or understand the “why.” What things were thought to prevent message acceptance or compliance? Especially for interactions seen as Refusal or Dismissal, participant explanations implicated many possible factors. Some of these were situational—external to the receiver who refused a message—while others were ascribed to internal causes. The following quotes show examples of external and internal explanations for message refusal.

<b>external factors</b> <i>e.g. misinformation, message quality</i>	<b>internal factors</b> <i>e.g. fear or other emotions, understanding</i>
A couple times we invited some professors, some experts on it. [The listeners] didn't believe any of that information. I think they had their own, too—they had their own experts on it. So that's what they tended to believe. P4	We can explain it, we can demonstrate the facts, but it doesn't remove the fear. People have the fear because they don't quite understand it. And it's not so easy to understand. P3

Some explanations were more generous than others in how they characterized the refusing non-listener. Explanations based on external factors held a sort of middle ground. By nature, external-only explanations do not place blame on the receiver—but neither do they much recognize a receiver's autonomy or active role in the listening process. Internal factor explanations, on the other hand, varied much more and included examples at both extremes. Sometimes fault was attributed to internal factors described as character flaws or willful behaviour. Other times, explanations centered around recognition and acceptance of diverse individual experiences and worldviews. This participant quote demonstrates:

---

I would never judge anybody for believing [the project] was a great idea. Because I know what I know and I have my opinion, and I'm totally fine with everybody having their opinion. P17

---

### ***Power Dynamics***

Power can be defined as “a disproportionate ability for some people or groups to control others’ outcomes” (Goodwin, Operario and Fiske 1998, p. 679). This can be specific to a given situation and other constraints. At the level of a single communication interaction, the outcome of that interaction (as listening or non-listening) might be more influenced by a message receiver than by a message sender. More broadly, however, the larger outcomes *surrounding* a communication interaction (decision-making, policy changes, and actions taken) might be more influenced by whomever holds more power or influence to enact change on a broader scale.

Power plays a moderate role in Refusal non-listening. In a micro-analytic sense, a receiver who refuses a message is always in a position of *some* power. To the extent that any sender has a choice to comply or refuse to comply, their behaviour and response will influence goals and outcomes for message senders. But in a broader sense of situational power, senders may equally direct their messages—and hope or expect compliance—from people having higher or lower relative power than themselves. As we will see in later sections, this is different from the very pronounced power dynamics that are integral to patterns like Blocking and Disruption.

Different power dynamics may influence how Refusal interactions play out. When a sender holds a position of relative power, they may have more explicit expectations for how message receivers “should” respond. Expectations for compliance, including specific directives or requests made, may be more overt within these interactions. Between equals, on the other hand, a message sender may give more allowance for the individuality of the other person, and have more acceptance for divergent opinions and personal choice. They may then have lesser, or more flexible, expectations for the other person to change.

Finally, when the message *receiver* is in a position of relative power, a response they give and perceive as “refusal” may be more likely to be interpreted as “dismissal” by the message senders.

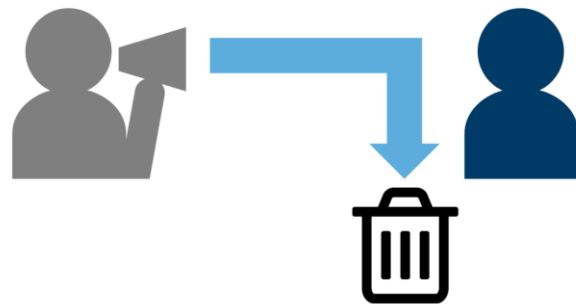
Because the original message was “talking up” the power spectrum, the degree to which those in power are willing to genuinely consider requests or accept input may be in greater doubt.

### 4.3 Dismissal

In **dismissal**, a message receiver is present to receive a message. They give a response but engage only superficially; they do not give true **consideration** to message content, and they respond by disregarding or rejecting the message.

Refusal is, sometimes, perceived as respectful. This is because refusal does include at least *some* willingness to engage with the content of a message and give it fair consideration. Dismissal, on the other hand, is a response that does **not** give due consideration to message content. It acknowledges the message and perhaps acknowledges the content (unlike Withdrawal), but Dismissal judges a message to be unworthy of consideration or regard—for any number of possible reasons. A Dismissive response (or a response seen as dismissive, anyway) conveys this in some way. Most often, this disregard ends up directed (at least in part) to the *sender* of the message. It is possible that something about the sender leads the receiver to discount the message; it is also possible that something about the message content leads the receiver to disparage the sender. In either case, the communication exchange becomes diverted away from a content-based dialogue (Figure 4.5). Here is an example where a participant’s intelligence was insulted on the base of disagreement over beliefs:

FIGURE 4.5 – DISMISSAL



More of a personal attack against me. It leaves the “let’s look at the research and the scientific fact” and had become human-bashing. It was just: “you’re stupid if you believe [this].” P7

Dismissive interactions were almost always characterized as failures to listen, or as indicators that listening had not occurred. Several participants drew a clear distinction in saying that *hearing* a message could not count as listening if the receiver did not intend (or was not willing) to seriously consider what they heard. In particular, the term “consulting” was used by a number of participants to describe these meaningless charades of soliciting feedback:

Not consulting. Consulting is:

“Is it okay with you?”

“No, it’s not okay.”

“Oh! Too bad.”

If I have consulted with you that doesn’t mean that I actually listened to you! P7

From the perspective of this and other participants, “consulting” behaviours with this sort of *a priori* dismissal are a facade for real listening: there is no actual intent to meaningfully consider the messages that are received.

Note that the categorization of an interaction can vary based on perspective. From the consulter’s point of view, they might have considered the input fairly and would therefore be “Refusing” the

message or request and not dismissing it. But if their consideration for a message is happening behind the scenes, there is no way for observers to know or be certain that a process of fair consideration has taken place.

### ***Non-Verbal Communication***

Participants characterised Dismissive behaviours as disrespectful. There are many ways of conveying one's attitude towards another person; these very often go beyond the words that are expressed. A number of participants identified specific examples of behaviour that had communicated disregard through non-verbal means.

For example, body language:

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They were dismissive of the people who provided the information. They'd ask for information and the information would be provided. And then they would have these little behaviours letting the person know that "taking this, but don't think much of you" kind of thing. P13

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Or tone of voice:

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They were getting regularly into these 'back-and-forth's. Basically, you could hear the words: "*Are you that stupid that you can't see beyond the nose of your face?*" You could just *hear* it in their language that that's what they wanted to say. P5

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Several participants described Dismissive interactions where a receiver's disregard for a sender was distinctly condescending. This was often the case with different educational backgrounds. One participant (who herself works in industry) described seeing this attitude from others in industry who dismissed, and did not understand or fully appreciate, a community's values:

---

There are a bunch of people who have PhDs; and sometimes they just choose not to listen to people if it doesn't mesh with their educational background.

---

Because they might have an engineering degree—or whatever type of degree—they're like: "Well I'm more educated than those people, so, whatever, I'll play the game." P1

---

Another participant elaborates on the relational fallout, and severe lack of trust, that can result when people feel dismissed and condescended to:

---

When people of very good education talk down to other people that they feel don't have the same education? That's where you'll hit a brick wall. Because people *know* that.

**I don't trust people who talk down to me.** I may not have the same education as you—but don't remind me of that. I didn't choose to go down your route.

...and that's the impression I got of these men that came in: they talk down to you, you know, and you're just a hick from some little, two-horse town. Just because I live in a two-horse town—and I might be a hick—don't treat me like I'm stupid. And don't say that *we don't know* what we're talking about: Excuse me? P6

---

### ***Grounds for Dismissal***

Whether they were on the receiving end of Dismissal or describing their own dismissal of another message, participants related many different reasons or foundations for a dismissive response.

Some were founded, for example, in assumptions of the other person's inferiority (like the above examples showing condescension). Other "grounds for dismissal" of a sender might include:

- perceived lack of awareness
- priorities misaligned with those of the message receiver
- knowledge or background assumptions misaligned with those of the receiver
- group membership
- social relationships or family ties

In the first of these, Dismissal of a message sender's ideas can be linked to perceptions that the sender lacks full awareness of a situation. Here, one participant who supported a development project speculates on why predominant attitudes in her community ran against it:

---

There were these polls that were done in the newspapers showing that people were against it—the majority. But I don't think a lot of those people had the real information. P8

---

Another participant shared her frustrated response to the concerns of certain opponents she describes as fearmongers:

---

I was just like, "you haven't done your research." P7

---

Here, the participant was in a message-receiving role. In a separate context—this time from an observer role—the same participant [P7] described how some project supporters were dismissive of people whose priorities did not align with their own. The supporters expressed that they didn't care about other concerns, downplaying these and instead favoring their own areas of concern as most important for discussion.

Further to misalignment of priorities is the possibility for misaligned knowledge and information between sender and receiver. (Perceived) inaccuracy of information, or misalignment with the receiver's own informed opinion, can lead to dismissive and exasperated responses. Speaking from a sender's perspective, one participant tells of observing this tendency. Certain audiences, she says, invariably dismissed messages that did not align with their own particular assumptions and background knowledge:

---

Generally, people who come at us with a more, I'd say, semi-scientific background: they're not willing to listen. Because they believe they have the data and the data is correct and you can't change the data. P3

---

Another common pattern in interviews was Dismissal based on group membership, or based on affiliation with other people or organizations. One participant who had moved to a community only a few years prior described how her opinions were slighted because she did not have "insider" status:

---

People would view me as an outsider: "You're not from here so you wouldn't know!" How dare I come here from outside with my crazy-brained ideas to have the nuclear industry here? How dare I come to this small community and bring my highfalutin city ideas here? It got to the point where it was quite toxic conversation. Against me—because I am an outsider. P7

---



Another participant described how she was often met with distrust. This was because she worked for an organization connected to industry, in a liaison role. In-group status in her community was not enough, in her case, to overshadow the effects of this affiliation.

Even informal affiliations—mere association, or family ties—were sometimes cause enough for stakeholders to dismiss someone’s motives, opinions or information. One participant described how someone she knew became a target of others’ assumptions and distrust after his interactions with organization representatives.

---

He would try to explain to people that “No, I’m not [in favor]. Just because I’m a part of this doesn’t mean that I’m for it.” But people don’t listen. They see him with the [organization] people then they automatically say “okay, you’re for this project.” And that was it. P13

---

This participant went on to tell how second-degree affiliation began to affect how *she* was perceived, too. Owing to her relationship with the person, some people automatically mistrusted her, too, and likewise made incorrect assumptions about her position on an issue.

### ***Power Dynamics***

Dismissive non-listening involves the assertion of a power dynamic. But this can be present in different ways. Sometimes an established power dynamic is very pronounced and all-encompassing. Take, for example, a situation where government—or any other decision-making group with abundant resources—disregards the concerns of community stakeholders. Other times, the power dynamic at play may be subtle and localized. It can be as small as the minimum dynamic that exists *any* time a speaker tries to persuade an audience. At minimum, the target of a persuasion attempt still has the power to give a speaker their attention—or not; to accept an argument—or not; to be persuaded to change their opinion—or not.

Acts of Dismissal are an assertion of power by a person (or group) in a position of relative power within the specific context of an interaction. To Dismiss someone’s communication attempt is to assert one’s power to say: “I don’t have to listen to you—I don’t have to listen to this;” or “I am going to hold my opinions no matter what you say;” or “I am going to carry out my plans no matter what concerns you have.”

Some Dismissive interactions that were shared by participants did fall along established imbalances of recognized societal power. For example, along gender lines:

---

Have you ever come across where you’ll have a male professor, and you have an opinion that differs from him and he just says: “Okay.” [gesture indicating finality]?

I find that a lot of times—with men that are in any kind of *power position*—when a woman speaks and is different than his opinion, he tends to: [mutters] “OKAY, I’ll let her talk—for a minute. But you know, I’ll just say...” P6

---

This participant went on to relate a time when she had been discussing an issue of public concern with another woman, and they were rudely interrupted by a man who barged into their conversation. When challenged, this man directly asserted that—*because* he was male—his was “the only opinion that counts!” [P6]

Government control and institutional authority is another area of pronounced societal power. Believing that you are inconsequential to a powerful organization—that your concerns will be



dismissed out of hand—triggers fear and uncertainty. One participant talks about the mistrust of government held by those who feel powerless in comparison. Her perspective underscores a connection between feeling dismissed by, and lacking trust in, a person or organization.

---

There are still people who are afraid of things like that. They secretly think that the government would poison us to further research, or make a point or whatever—because we’re just small time, little people. “We don’t really matter.” You know? P11

---

Some participants were wary of this authority. Here, one conveys her view of government control. She describes how a government has power to barrel in and announce decisions without regard to anything (or anyone) else:

---

Like the government coming in and saying “We don’t give a rat’s ass what you think. We’re doing this, because it is good for your community—because we say it is good for your community.” P7

---

Shifting power dynamics may change the extent to which a receiver is free to Dismiss messages, at least in a formal sense. For example, a development company might Dismiss input from local communities if there are no consequences to them doing so. But if a regulatory body imposes new requirements, things can change. If laws mandate that community concerns be heard and accounted for, this *limits* the power to Dismiss that the developer once held. At minimum, the company may be required to create formal procedures for handling community input.

(Of course, the results of strong-armed requirements are hardly guaranteed. The degree to which any consideration of community input is actually genuine—or just “jumping through hoops”, “ticking boxes”—may vary. Even then it will ultimately be a matter of interpretation to say if the company’s response still carries Dismissive qualities or intent).

### ***(Lack of) Trust***

Trust (or lack thereof) featured prominently in many examples of Dismissal; it has been a recurring element in each aspect of Dismissal discussed so far. Dismissing a message with accusations that it is deceitful, manipulative, or untrue implicates an un-trusting relationship between message sender and receiver. Deep mistrust was implicated in many “*a priori* dismissal” situations, where a message would never be considered fairly because of its origin (the message sender). Participants who had faced these interactions became upset when others called them liars, an accusation that they felt was unfair and made no sense.

In one situation of this type, a participant felt that another group would never accept any information no matter what was said or how it was presented:

---

Their comeback would always be: “Yes, but your scientists are the ones that you believe, and this is a scientist we believe. So we believe them, we don’t believe you and this one.” It would just go back and forth. P5

---

Another participant suggests that Dismissal based on such deep mistrust is nigh impossible to overcome, and generates limited options for responding in turn:

---

They’ll say, “Well no, you’re just all in league and you’re all lying to us.” And that’s just their view of the world. You can’t do much about it except be nice to them. P15

---

Trust was lacking not only in receivers' views of message senders, but also in the other direction. When speaking in terms of a sender role, participants communicated a lack of trust in receivers' willingness to listen, to listen fairly, and to engage in dialogue when they perceived responses from those people to be dismissive:

---

If you want to find a reason to not agree with somebody, it doesn't really matter what answer [is given]: you're going to find an opposing answer, right? P5

---

In any case, dismissive interactions show active, not passive, disrespect in that they communicate disregard for the other person. The next section, Withdrawal, will discuss actions that may be similar, but are passive rather than active. In both Dismissal and Withdrawal, the receiver makes a choice not to engage with message content. But Withdrawal, as we will see, is a termination of sender-receiver interactions. In Dismissal, a receiver *continues* the interaction with their response—a response which shows (or suggests) that they don't feel the message is worthy of consideration. In so doing, dismissive responses show a superficial level of engagement, but not one that is constructive to relationships.

## 4.4 Withdrawal

In **withdrawal**, a message receiver hears a message, but does not maintain **presence**. The message is expressed with mutual access, but the receiver chooses to assert power over self and withdraw. By doing this, they disengage from a listening role and terminate the interaction.

Withdrawal is characterized by a shift to non-engagement—a message recipient’s conscious choice to pull away from interactions with the message and message sender (Figure 4.6). Withdrawal shares many similarities with another non-listening type, Isolation. (Following the current section on Withdrawal, Isolation will be discussed next.) But the key difference between these two is *timing*. To qualify as Withdrawal, the receiver must still have been present, physically and attentively, to hear (*i.e.*, apprehend) a message at the start. The message sender must have made contact—must at least have this minimal level of access to their intended audience. But instead of a contrary response (refusal) or a flippant response (dismissal), the Withdrawal non-listening pattern is a *lack* of meaningful response. To review the three non-listening types discussed so far:

FIGURE 4.6 – WITHDRAWAL



- In Refusal, a receiver has engaged with message content in good faith, but has refused to accept information or comply with a directive;
- In Dismissal, a receiver does not consider the message content, but likely engages with the *sender* in some way, though often disrespectfully;
- In Withdrawal, the receiver asserts a limited degree of control (over their own boundaries and actions) in order to remove themselves from the role of “listener” in an interaction, setting, or social context.

Withdrawal is not an especially ambiguous type of interaction. There is not much difference in its interpretation from each side: sender versus receiver. Receivers who withdraw generally see a justified reason to pull away instead of responding, and they do recognize that their decision to withdraw goes in opposition to listening behaviours.

### ***Avoidant Behaviour***

Withdrawal is often done as a response to negative experiences or uncomfortable situations. As avoidant behaviour, it *can* be perceived as disrespectful, but less so and less often so than other interaction patterns (*i.e.*, Dismiss or Disrupt). In comparison to these, Withdrawal is a very passive action. It is non-aggressive. If negative feelings are had towards a message sender, these are kept mostly quiet (openly voicing them would be characteristic of Dismissal or Disruption, instead).

A participant who told of her discomfort around certain people and conversations shared how this motivated her to avoid those same people, dis-associate herself from them, and limit her own participation in those conversations. She describes her feelings this way:

---

It totally turned me off, their behaviour. I figured: I can't be listening to you because you're not making any sense. And I better have an open mind about this, and not listen to people who [behave like that]. P13

---

Another participant described how she felt uncomfortable around the atmosphere and behaviour of others that were present in certain meetings:

---

The meetings got heated. It wasn't a very enjoyable scene. I'm a pretty low-drama kind of person. I don't like to be in that scene. P17

---

Other participants described seeing avoidant behaviour from others who were faced with topics or lines of questioning they did not like. In two parts of an interview quite removed from each other, one participant describes her observations of individuals, and later of organizations, who display this sort of topic-avoidant, withdrawal-type behaviour:

---

[When a person was confronted with an argument:] She'd just look at you and go, "well I don't want to talk about that." P5

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---

If you go to a company and start talking about social licensing, they'll change the subject! They don't want to have that conversation. P5

---

From the perspective of a message sender—the person posing an argument or raising a topic from which a receiver then withdraws—this avoidant sidestepping can even feel *Dismissive*. Indeed, interactions like these straddle the line between Dismissal and Withdrawal patterns of non-listening. They mix elements of both, especially when considering both the “sender” and “receiver” points of view. Remember that elements of a single communication event or interaction can often be well-described by more than one non-listening pattern in this model.

For the responses described above, there are characteristics of these that *Dismissal* alone would fail to capture, but which *Withdrawal* describes well. First is that the receivers do not engage with the message *topic*, let alone the message's content. Second is the passivity or non-aggression shown. There is no rejection or overt disregard levied at message senders. Withdrawal responses speak less to any assertion of a power dynamic. Instead, they relate to how a receiver asserts their *own* boundaries and preferences for interaction.

### ***Social Relationships***

Even though it is a passive action, Withdrawal can both result from and lead to a breakdown of interpersonal relationships. Here a participant describes how having unpleasant, frustrating conversations with others affected her social relationships with them. Note that the attitude held towards these people shows elements of Dismissal. Withdrawal is best shown here by behaviour: the ensuing choice she makes to pull away from discussions and relationships with them:

---

I can't respect people like that. And then: why would I want to have a conversation with somebody who—I'm sort of like, "You're so stupid, sorry, but I can't respect you!" And then I have to talk about the weather.

---

So you know, it's better not to be friends. It's better not to socialize. I mean, I can still say to that person "Hi, how are you doing?" "Good, good." But I don't have them over to my house for supper. P7

---

The same participant explains her decision to withdraw from these relationships, showing how withdrawal can function as a social defense mechanism:

---

I don't have the time or the energy—I am getting too old and I have only a little bit of time left in my life—to spend on people who are narrow-minded. P7

---

Withdrawal can be hurtful for those on the receiving end, especially if it extends far beyond the boundaries of a contentious topic to limit other, more general interactions with a person. One participant shares how, as a result of past community conflict, she is now shunned in day-to-day interactions by someone she had once been friendly with:

---

[She] started shunning me. And she still does to this day. She used to be real happy to see me before! She'd be like "Hiiiiii!" you know. And then now, she sees me, she turns away. P13

---

This distressing interaction was a case of unilateral withdrawal, where one party chose to end a relationship or interaction that the other wished to maintain. On the other hand, withdrawal can be a positive way to mediate relationship conflict if it is negotiated and agreed upon by both parties. One participant describes how she and a close friend set boundaries to maintain their friendship in spite of tension from opposing views:

---

We cut things off if things get too emotional or whatever: "Okay. Let's just not talk about it now; it's over, it's done with, we can agree to disagree." P1

---

Withdrawal can also be constructive when it is employed to avoid or prevent further escalation of an already-negative social interaction. After saying something rude online (and regretting it), a participant describes her conscious choice to withdraw from the escalation that followed:

---

I had an option: I could have just deleted and retracted everything, but I knew that they would turn that around. So I basically just got out of the conversation. P5

---

To diffuse the situation (and calm herself) this participant withdrew from the conversation entirely. She retreated from the critical online environment, and likewise refrained from making further comments of her own. As seen in this situation, withdrawing as a listener often implicates "withdrawing" from one's role as a message sender also. This association will be explored in the later section on Blocking, which deals with situations that can silence a message at its source.

As seen in the above examples, Withdrawal is often tied closely to its relational context. It can be a response to poor relationship dynamics but is not always so. Its consequences may either harm or help relationships, but it does create distance either way.

Though the primary definition of Withdrawal in this paper's framework concerns the act of withdrawing from a *listening* role, patterns of withdrawal are often more broad than this and are hard to tease out. A Withdrawal interaction may encompass an entire relationship rather than a single communication event. Even when withdrawal *is* specific to one communication context, withdrawing as a listener is often paired with self-censorship (Blocking) from a speaking role also. In all cases, Withdrawal is ultimately a self-protective reaction.

### ***Assertiveness and Power Dynamics***

Because it is a passive form of non-listening, Withdrawal is very personal, centered on the one who withdraws. Power dynamics in the usual sense do not play as prominent a role. The act of withdrawal involves asserting power, but over a much more limited sphere of influence. Withdrawal asserts control over one's own self and involvement. It does not assert power over others in the way that Dismissal or Disruption might.

Take, for example, this story from a participant that shows one community's response towards invasive, "consulting"-type communication attempts. A group of organization representatives were intent on seeking an audience with a group of First Nations community leaders. These community leaders first expressed disinterest, but the representatives—doggedly persistent—would not take no for an answer and insisted on delivering their message. Finally the leaders relented, and a time was arranged for the meeting. The organization's representatives had wanted, presumably, to garner feedback and engagement—to open a dialogue on their topic of interest. Instead... *this* is how our participant paraphrased community leaders' attitudes once the meeting had finally taken place:

---

"Okay, you met with us. Now goodbye! Next agenda item." p9

---

The leaders had agreed to a meeting, but they did not wish for or agree to any further involvement. These message receivers were reluctant in their role at best, and unsurprisingly, they responded to the message with Withdrawal, not engagement. Allowing the meeting at all was a compromise, and the leaders maintained other boundaries by withdrawing rather than engaging afterwards. Drawing and maintaining these boundaries is the sort of control and autonomy that is exercised in Withdrawal interactions.

There are still limits to a receiver's sphere of control over self. We can see this from considering how power-enforced limitations can restrict a receiver's ability to withdraw. With a large power imbalance, some situations can limit the actions available to a reluctant listener. Mental withdrawal to an isolated state of "this doesn't concern me" could still be possible, of course, but leaving the room, or refusing to negotiate, may not be.

### ***Consent to Participate***

Withdrawal non-listening can be summarized as a question of consent. Is the person in a message-receiving role willing to participate in an interaction? When a message originates, only the sender is involved at first: if that message never reaches an audience, no communication link is established. But *after* establishing a sender-receiver communication dyad, continued interaction depends on the willingness of both parties. Before an interaction can go any further in terms of engagement, the message sender and receiver must each recognize themselves in those roles. All this requires is a receiver's willingness or consent to participate, regardless of how they respond. A withdrawal interaction is the withdrawal of that consent, and a lack of further response to the sender's message.

The next section, Isolation, will describe a pattern where this question of consent is never fully relevant, because a message has not even reached its audience.

## 4.5 Isolation

In **isolation**, dis-connectivity in a communication network prevents mutual **access** for sender-receiver communication. The sender expresses a message, but the message fails to reach a certain would-be receiver. No engagement is possible.

Whereas *withdrawal* is an action/response, *isolation* is a state of initial disconnection between a sender and receiver (Figure 4.7). It can have many underlying causes, whether from circumstance, ignorance, or intent on either side. To further distinguish *isolation* events from *withdrawal* events, isolation can be thought of as an inhibitive state rather than a response:

- Withdrawal is an action-response that happens *after* a receiver hears a message: they give no substantial response and instead remove themselves from the interaction.
- Isolation is a circumstance that occurs *before* a message is received; something precludes the would-be receiver from hearing, being present for, or fully receiving the message.

Timing is key. Isolation can (and often does) follow withdrawal in short succession. A person can be present to receive a message, become uncomfortable, and withdraw from that interaction. If they maintain the avoidant behaviour and are not present or available for future interactions in similar contexts, they isolate themselves from future, unheard messages. Withdrawal applies to the initial, received message. Isolation applies to later, un-received messages.

Isolation has a broader possible network scope than *refusal*, *dismissal*, or *withdrawal*. Each of those was concerned with message transmission in a single dyad (two people or groups or organizations: one in the sender role and one in a receiver role). But because isolation precludes message reception, a clear dyad is not always established. It is possible for a receiver to be isolated from a particular sender, but it is also possible to be isolated from a group, message, idea, topic, setting, or conversation. Because isolation can also vary so much in terms of cause (sender, receiver, both or neither), isolated non-listening is less about who is responsible and more about the overall (dis)connectivity present in a communication network. The next few sections will show examples of isolation from causes identified in participant interviews.

### ***Isolating Factors***

The following subsections feature a variety of examples from interviews. These examples are grouped to show possible factors that can cause an Isolation non-listening dynamic between stakeholders. This list reflects a few of the more common situations identified from interviews. It is not an exhaustive list. There are five causal factors discussed here:

- 1 Disinterest
  - *No attention paid to a message; has low personal relevance to receiver*
- 2 Accessibility issues
  - *Practical barriers to communication obstruct message transmission*

FIGURE 4.7 – ISOLATION





- 3 Precluded disagreement
  - *Receiver pre-emptively avoids hearing messages they disagree with*
- 4 Self-limiting to a sender role
  - *Prospective receiver does not see “receiving messages” as part of their role*
- 5 Lack of awareness
  - *Communication channels are not established; receiver is unaware of message*

## 1 Disinterest

If a person has no interest in a topic, they may not pay any attention to related messages. This disconnect is a type of isolation, because the content of these messages cannot fully reach this receiver in the first place. Responses that involve passing judgement to reject or consider message content (Dismissal and Refusal) or that choose to *disengage* (Withdrawal) are irrelevant here. No engagement in any form has taken place to begin with.

Disinterest can be a frustrating hurdle from the perspective of a sender trying to be heard by their intended audience. Lack of interest in the message topic, argument, content, source, or purpose can all preclude the level of attention that is needed for message reception.

Speaking about community discussion over a proposed project, one participant explains the reasons for her lack of involvement.

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People would be talking about it but I never paid any attention. I never had any interest in it whatsoever... and it didn't interest me to learn anything about it. P17

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Another participant who did community outreach for an organization describes how some were completely uninterested in the information she offered.

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There was really no interest in Alberta; BC. Not really. They didn't care. P9

---

When audiences saw a topic as having little to no personal relevance, they were less motivated to pay attention or to be present to receive messages. Discussions and topics deemed unlikely to affect one's life were seen as low-stakes and were met with low interest. One participant told how community discussion about industry involvement in her town was very limited outside of the most visibly-relevant topics:

---

Other than [sponsorship, community donations]—I don't hear it come up in conversations. I don't. It's not like it's a hot topic for people. P14

---

Another participant characterized corporate attitudes toward Social License in similar terms, saying company representatives “don't want to have that conversation” [P5] and they only want to be concerned with the technical and economic sides of resource extraction.

Immediacy of an issue was important. As perceptions in one community changed to see an issue as more pressing, more likely to have effects on the community in the near future—participation increased and more community members began to pay attention to discussions around it.

---

[The meetings] were open to the public. And initially, no one was showing any interest, because people basically just went, “it's never going to happen.” P11

---



More than one participant described how they began to pay more attention and become more informed as discussions progressed, with the possibility of local development becoming more and more concrete:

---

People are so compliant, hey?  
So you know, unless it's  
coming out tomorrow! Then  
they'll come out. P4

---

## 2 Accessibility issues

Even when a message *is* personally relevant, interested receivers can find themselves isolated from it by other barriers to communication. Any communication channel between a message sender and receiver requires mutual access. Sometimes the circumstances of an interaction limit this access. For example, geographic or logistical barriers can often present difficulty. Language difficulties or a lack of shared background knowledge can similarly inhibit reception if a message cannot be understood when it is heard.

In one community, scheduled public meeting times were not equally accessible to residents when so many of them had other commitments. Along with disinterest, this was a challenge in getting community members out to hear news and information:

---

It's tricky because the people who would've got the most out of this information, and would've been willing to listen, they're all busy. Everybody's so busy. Like, there's hockey and there's a million different groups. There's all kinds of things that you do. And so, if it's not an important issue, you probably won't come, you know? You don't have the time. P11

---

One participant told of a community member who lived away from any population centres and who could not be reached by email, mail or phone communication, web postings, or community noticeboards. This community member wanted advance notice of scheduled meetings, but remained unsatisfied—geographical and logistical isolation stood in the way. “It was just a refusal to be communicated with,” says the participant, “making it absolutely impossible. Because we were trying to chase down every avenue to make sure he could be communicated with and notified.” [P1] Difficulties like these are common in Saskatchewan's North, and non-local companies may be especially unaware of how to bridge tricky logistics and get a message out:

---

So the government writes a letter—well, letters don't cut it up here. You got to do it face to face. And so the letters get lost, there's no response, so [companies] take it as acceptance, they carry on regardless; the community says: “Hey! What's going on?” P15

---

Language barriers were also especially relevant to communication with some stakeholders. Several participants described challenges to discussing topics—stakeholders who did not share a *particular* educational background for technical terms, or a *particular* cultural background for interpreting ideas, were often isolated from conveying certain layers of meaning whether or not they were speaking the same language. Speaking about barriers to inclusion faced by First Nations stakeholders, one participant says:

---

There's that isolation again, and the messaging. Linguistic isolation goes all the way back to the signing of the treaties, and not understanding the same concepts behind the wording. P1

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### 3 Precluded disagreement

Participants described a type of self-imposed isolation where people who disagreed strongly with certain opinions would decline to hear or even be present for ideas they did not agree with. This sort of conscious isolation shares some similarities with *dismissal*, but it goes one step further. Not only dismissing a heard message out of hand, a receiver might avoid exposure to messages like it in the future. They are “pre-dismissing” by avoiding messages that they *might* hear. The person likely feels justified in this avoidance: for example, they may feel they’ve “heard it all said before,” or they may feel that people speaking on an issue are so untrustworthy that they are not worth interacting with. Here are a few examples of participants describing this sort of isolation by themselves or by others:

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I never really paid that much attention to it, because I was so against it from the get-go. p6

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[With toxic interactions] it becomes: “don’t talk to me about that, because I’m just dead set against it for whatever reason.” p7

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We all get entrenched in what we think we believe or what we think we know; you don’t want to hear any other side. ... I found it a little frustrating because it was like: “It doesn’t matter what you tell me, I don’t believe anything you say, so get lost.” And then they refused to go down to see any of this that was happening. The walls were up, and there was no letting any kind of information in. p8

---

One participant had spent time liaising with many communities about a prospective project. She received a range of responses. Some communities were self-isolating and barred all communication on the issue, whereas others were allowing of access. Her examples illustrate the difference between Self-Isolation and Withdrawal in response to unwanted interactions. In cases of isolation, some people and communities declined meeting at all due to lack of trust:

---

We’d meet with the interested communities and surrounding communities. And a lot of them didn’t want to meet with us. They tell you: “I think you’re consulting and I don’t wanna meet with you.” “I think you’re in somebody’s pocket already.” They’re like, “You’re consulting, that’s what you’re doing. I don’t want anybody to even know we’re in the same room.” p9

---

By contrast, this participant tells how other community leaders did relent when organization representatives insisted on meeting with them. Those leaders did not self-isolate, yet did signal a withdrawal, afterwards, by declining any further discussion on the topic.

### 4 Self-limiting to a sender role

Self-isolation is not always overtly intended. Sometimes a person isolates or insulates themselves from receiving messages by the way they conceptualize their role in a communication context. A person (or organization) may see themselves in a “sending messages” role exclusively. Or, they may limit their role to only receiving certain *types* of messages (for example, welcoming questions from an audience but not statements of opinion). Reasons for seeing communication in a limited or one-directional paradigm like this can vary widely, and the actions involved can range from purposeful to inadvertent. Here are a few examples from interviews.

When organizations see themselves mainly—or only—as informants, they preclude themselves from listening to communities in a meaningful way. For one participant, this narrow view of directional communication is a big part of why she dislikes what she calls “consulting” attitudes:

---

You don’t just willy-nilly walk in and go “We’re going to do it. Oh man—but you should be lucky because we’re giving you jobs!” P7

---

Comments from another participant, who has industry experience, lend credibility to these concerns about consulting. She says:

---

Companies dance around the issue. They dance around it, they say things like “Let’s just say we’re... let’s just say this is in consultation. This is engagement.” P9

---

The purpose or intent of public meetings was often a point of tension between project opponents and proponents. If those who ran the meeting did so with the intent to merely convey information and educate, and those attending the meeting did so with intent to voice opinions and protests to influence a decision, both sides would become frustrated. Each side had a frame of mind to situate themselves primarily in a position as “message senders”.

One participant relates the meeting organizers’ point of view:

---

When we had trade shows and such, it wasn’t looking for their consent. We were just trying to educate them. It was just a learning process. There were no decisions; it was far, far from that. It was just learning; educating. There were not going to be any decisions—that was years down the road. P4

---

This participant outlines a self-perceived “sender” role of informing and educating members of the community. Going into a communication situation, a predefined concept of interpersonal roles can limit people to listen only to certain *kinds* of messages. Messages of approval or disapproval, messages of consent: these were seen as not relevant to an interaction’s purpose.

Self-perceived roles can also influence stakeholder choices to engage or participate in the first place. If expected outcomes are not positive for a stakeholder in their preferred role, they may self-isolate in a more literal sense. One community member explains her decision to not attend meetings by framing it in terms of likely contribution to a message. She says:

---

Yes, my body there would have shown solidarity. But you get too many of us, or too many people trying to put their opinions forward, and you’re really not getting any further ahead. P6

---

In part because she did not foresee practical success—as a message sender—if she attended, and because she *did* foresee a chance of negative outcomes, this person opted not to attend: “I thought, ‘well, best if I not go’ for the greater cause.” [P6] This also isolated her as a receiver.

## 5 (Lack of) awareness

Finally, some examples of isolation point to simple inattention, unawareness, or oversight of certain messages. If a sender-receiver pair lacks established communication channels, a message may never reach its target. The would-be receiver then has no idea what the message is, or even that someone has a message to send. Organizations must make decisions on which stakeholder

groups to connect with on a given topic. If any stakeholder group is overlooked, this can isolate the organization from hearing messages from those stakeholders.

Self-limited communication roles can influence which channels are established. Organizers of some community information events did not see their role as polling for approval, only for educating, and so did not create communication channels for hearing (dis)approval:

---

There was never a survey done to see, you know, who approved and who disapproved. P4

---

A young adult participant told how, at a meeting, community members expressed concern about ensuring the best future for their children. In response, she spoke up in the meeting to share her frustrations about oversight and unawareness of actual youth voices in the community. Her perspective reflects inattentive isolation by other community members, and a possible lack of communication channels between them and local youth.

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I was the children they were talking about... and no one was even considering what we actually wanted and what we were actually thinking about. P10

---

Within industry, one employee described how certain technical staff end up isolated from hearing or understanding community perspectives:

---

We have a Corporate Social Responsibility Department at {company} that kind of just sticks to themselves. They go out and they do all that public consultation, but they don't really come to site and consult with the technical staff at all. P1

---

Here the communication channels did exist for CSR representatives to listen to community concerns, but channels allowing technical staff to hear and understand those perspectives were not well-established, contributing to isolation.

### ***Perceptions and Power Dynamics***

Because of the varied ways that communication channels can be absent or ineffective, power dynamics play only a peripheral role in isolation patterns of non-listening. Here, the biggest influence of power is in its implications for who, or which organization, is most capable of bridging gaps in communication.

For keeping remote communities informed of industry activity and developments, government and industry are message senders. To bridge this geographic isolation, large organizations (the senders) likely have the greatest means for facilitating messages to reach all receivers. In another case, government or industry organizations might be message receivers instead—perhaps through lack of awareness, they are inattentive to community feedback. Even though the sender/receiver roles have been flipped, large organizations would still have the greatest means for enacting change.

Who deserves to have access to a message? Which messages are relevant enough to merit full attention from receivers? Stakeholders may have different answers. They may also have different perspectives on who bears responsibility for maintaining or establishing communication lines. And where there is an isolation gap, they may see a different extent of their own and others' abilities or influence to bridge that gap. Take this situation, for example:

---

Sometimes with [government projects] they're just pushing it through, and people don't have a lot of time to gather information or know. p5

---

This participant identifies a communication gap where important information or messaging was not reaching members of the public. Her perspective implicates an onus on government to engage more fully in a consultation process. But different stakeholders would likely have different ideas about who can improve this situation, who *should* improve it, and how.

One final note on power dynamics: intentional self-isolation is *not always possible*. Sometimes, isolating actions are a deliberate strategy of passive resistance employed by would-be-receivers. In these situations, a large power imbalance can limit receivers' freedom to self-isolate. Message receivers who are not in positions of power may be thwarted from reaching an "isolated" state.

This is essentially similar to the power-enforced limitations on withdrawal options. Situational dynamics that prevent deliberate self-isolation can result in increased efforts to withdraw. By withdrawing (physically or mentally), unwilling message receivers assert what little control they do still have in an interaction. The example of First Nations community leaders who finally relented to meet with insistent organization representatives demonstrates this. The same participant who related that story goes on to explain her take on these power dynamics under current duty-to-consult legislation in Canada:

---

A community doesn't really have a choice. [With] consultation, a community can't just say "Oh, we can't be involved. We don't want to be involved. Leave us alone." Because if that company made every effort to come out and talk with that community, and the community just kept declining a meeting and the project goes ahead? They have to be involved. According to the law. And as long as the companies made every effort to meet with the communities, and the community has declined them, then they would probably turn around and say "You had your chance! You don't have your chance anymore, we tried. Now the project's going to go ahead." p9

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## 4.6 Blocking

In **blocking**, a message is halted at its source. A would-be message sender feels a lack of control or autonomy; they are disempowered and held back from **expression**. The source of the blocking force can range from external (threats, etc.) to internal (holding back in response to circumstances with negative outcomes for expression).

In all non-listening interactions discussed so far, a sender has voiced a message. Whether an audience had access to receive the message (vs. isolation), whether the receiver remained present (vs. withdrawal), and whether the receiver's response showed consideration (vs. dismissal) or compliance (vs. refusal)—these depict the interaction types discussed so far.

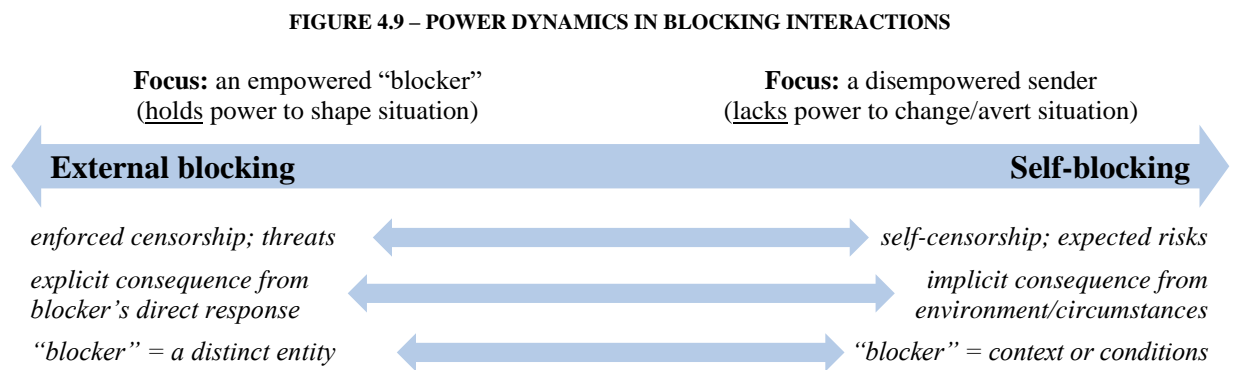
In all these interaction types, a message is at least *made available* to be heard. Initial message expression is required for any later assertion that listening has taken place.

Consider the alternative: how can anyone *listen* to something that was never *said*?

Blocking goes a step further towards eliminating any possibility of communication (Figure 4.8). In blocking interactions, a very large power imbalance silences a message at its source. Sometimes this blocking occurs comprehensively to stop a message (or messages) from being expressed by an individual or group. Other times it may limit or restrict certain communication channels by controlling *how*, *when*, *where*, or *to whom* people are permitted or given opportunities to speak.

### Power Dynamics

When blocking occurs, it is invariably tied up with a pronounced imbalance of power. Intent to silence or power to silence does not necessarily matter so much as *perceived* intent and *perceived* power. What counts is a party's effective influence over another, whether or not they are aware of that influence. Still, blocked communication channels are not always under the direct control of a powerful entity. Blocking interactions can be framed along a spectrum of focus (Figure 4.9):





For interactions on the **left** end of this spectrum, the focus is on the actions or influence of a “blocker”. The blocker (a person or entity) is in a position of power: they have a high degree of enforceable control over one or more communication channels.

Towards the **right** end of the spectrum, the focus is instead on the dis-empowerment felt by a would-be sender. Threats or deterrents still prevent the sender from expressing their message, but these arise from circumstance rather than deliberate placement. It may seem the sender has more autonomy in such situations. If a sender anticipates risks or consequences for expressing a message, and instead chooses to hold back because of this, “self-blocking” has occurred.

The following sections will describe blocking interactions that vary in their focus and underlying power dynamics. Quotes from participant interviews will show examples of interactions that tend more towards the **left** end of the spectrum (external blocking) or the **right** (self-blocking).

This spectrum is both fluid and subjective. None of these examples occupies a fixed location on a continuum to make fine-grained, absolute comparisons. Instead, describing a blocking situation or its attributes as “more external” or “more autonomous” is a generalization—albeit one that is helpful for understanding these non-listening interactions.

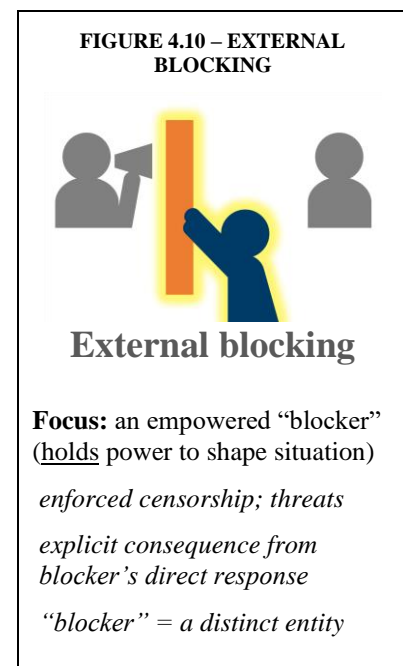
Subjectivity of the spectrum comes from differences in risk perception. The threats, risks, and consequences faced by a would-be sender may appear differently to that person than to observers. Divergent opinions arise when people make these evaluations. Different perceptions on risk/threat assessment and the perceived autonomy afforded to a speaker can create different perspectives on where a blocking interaction fits on the spectrum.

In what follows, the first set of participant examples will show elements that are characteristic of external blocking (**left side** of this spectrum). The second set will feature traits of self-blocking interactions (**right side**). The third section compares two detailed examples by a single participant. In both cases this participant had felt constrained from speaking, but her reasons for keeping silent in each case suggest different positions along the continuum for each.

### ***External Blocking***

Experiences shared by some participants demonstrate blocking that occurs with a focus on the empowered, blocking force. A person’s speech is restricted or silenced by a clear “other” who holds more power and control over the situation (Figure 4.10). Thus there are two distinct parties: the blocker and the would-be speaker (blockee). The blocker is distinctly external to the speaker but can be an individual, organization, or group. The control or consequences that restrain speech in these situations come from the blocker’s actions or authority.

With two clearly-involved parties in external blocking, different viewpoints emerge from each side. Perspectives seen in the next two subsections are grouped accordingly. The first subsection focuses on the perspectives of senders who feel blocked: in particular, how they view the authority and control they are subject to. The second subsection shows how those *in* control experience their side of an interaction: how they see their own actions and characterize the impacts these have for others.



## Disempowered Perspectives

How is power imbalance experienced by those who feel blocked, “shut down,” or constrained from speech? In blocking interactions that are more external, the would-be message sender feels disempowered in comparison to a specific person or group that *does* hold power. The threat of enforced consequences and control by this powerful entity is a focal point.

Many participants spoke about control wielded by various levels of government, or by corporate organizations. For example, this participant shares her view of government control:

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I suppose if they felt that they needed to do it, they would take that license away from everybody and just say, “You know what? We’re not dealing with you anymore and we’re taking this away from you. And if you don’t like it, well, then you’ll go to jail.”

---

I think that at the end of the day [the government] would ultimately have the ability to take charge and control of whatever they feel or deem necessary. P5

---

This participant perceived control based on actions she believed a government plausibly could or would take. Her description of a threat where “if you don’t like it”—*implying: if you say or do something to stop it*—“you’ll go to jail” involves a specific consequence by a powerful entity. An anticipated risk of powerful retaliation can entirely block the expression of some messages.

Others described situations where a person or organization took action to exercise control in a way that restricted message expression. In local meetings, organizers were able to set conditions for who could speak, and when. Project opponents perceived those in charge as being quite forceful against some opinions. When people running a meeting would use their authority to cut off certain speakers, some described this as an aggressive way to block communication:

---

They wanted you to see it their way, and only their way. They didn’t want people to have an opinion. And they would *shut you down*. Many-a-times [she] would be talking and they would shut her down. They’d say, [gestures like a basketball guard covering an opponent] “nope—nope—nope—enough!” P6

---

Other examples showed less direct force, but still reveal an imbalance of power—for example, control held over procedures or timing in meetings:

---

When they skirt around questions and when they pick and choose... when they say, “Okay, we’re only allowing 10 minutes...” well, that tells me that you don’t really want to answer questions. P17

---

While project opponents reacted most strongly to this control, neutral and proponent onlookers also noted the same power dynamics. The structure of some meetings limited certain senders’ opportunities to communicate. Speaking of project opponents who were feeling silenced, one meeting attendee says she would have preferred a different approach from the organizers:

---

I think I would have invited them to be part of the committee... listen to them, or allow them to talk more. In some ways I think they felt that they were shut down—I think so. P8

---



The same participant tells how committee members (many of whom were proponents) held control over speech conditions in most meetings. While others *could* speak, this was always at the committee's discretion and following certain protocols. The result, in her opinion, was that people felt "totally shut down and not listened to", and gave stronger reactions in response.

---

The committee had their process, they had their protocol: it was the committee that was meeting and discussing this, but they allowed observers in. But as an observer you weren't, so much, allowed to talk. You could make presentations. You could ask to be part of their agenda and make presentations. p8

---

### Empowered Perspectives

How do those who *hold* this control experience their own side of an external blocking situation? In positions of relative power, these people can enforce speech conditions and restrict or otherwise regulate message expression by others. Their own perspectives of these interactions make an interesting contrast to those who feel blocked by them.

---

We had meetings where we said, "We have to get better control over these meetings." And so we had to set up a stage; we had to have ourselves sitting; we had to have a moderator. We had to put up a [podium] because otherwise people were hollering over top of each other.

You can only speak once. If there was time at the end you might be able to speak again—because otherwise they would just keep monopolizing the time. p5

---

Generally, those in power did not deny the control they held. Organizers spoke about their efforts to manage meetings by creating structure and guidelines to regulate communication channels and opportunities for speech. Time limits, meeting agendas, question periods, and requiring advance notice to speak were some examples. The organizers' ability to implement these restrictions at all speaks directly to control over speech conditions—control that allows external Blocking to occur. Interviews also gave an account of perceived challenges that led meeting organizers to create restrictions. The organizer quoted above, for example, expressed concern with turn-taking and timing. "We would only run the question period so long," says another, "because we were running meetings that ended up being two and a half hours!" [P1]

From those who control speaking conditions, then, we see acknowledgement of restrictions they put in place—and often hear rationale as to *why*. In their view, these restrictions serve as reasonable or necessary boundaries: for example, to guide or facilitate discussion for a group. Still, this is not *always* the case. At times, even organizers expressed frustration with others in their group:

---

It's one thing to make a small mistake in a conversation when you're trying to explain your position. But it's another thing when you openly sit at every meeting, and you're on the committee to try and push your own agenda through. p5

---

This participant was concerned about organizers misusing their influence over speech conditions. She observed some who were "trying to push [their] own agenda" and did not always comply with guidelines that applied to everyone. Power exercised in this way can block other voices. But even when speech restrictions are *not* intended to be self-serving, their impact can still be imposing and threatening for those who feel disempowered and controlled by those *in* power.

Those who held control acknowledged some of these negative perceptions. They speculated at times on reasons for others' resistance—for example, guessing that some were not used to having such a formal process and disliked it out of unfamiliarity. Many observed that others *felt* blocked or “muzzled” by restrictions; yet, many of the same disagreed with these assessments:

---

I think some of them thought they were being muzzled. If they went and followed the process they were allowed their two minute question period and allowed to speak—so we weren't muzzling them. P1

---

There is a difference here in how those with more or less power in a situation used the word “muzzled.” To the interviewee quoted above, who was involved in organizing and running public meetings, “muzzling” would have meant *entirely* preventing someone from conveying a message. From this perspective, restrictions and requirements on speech (time limits, advance notice, specified communication channels, etc.) would not count as muzzling. Of course, others see these restrictions differently. For those who have no control over restrictions but are made to follow them, this power dynamic can leave them feeling “blocked” and not listened to. This difference of perspective can also be seen in a situation described by someone in industry:

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People accused the companies of “muzzling” them—muzzling the aboriginal community and denying them the right to speak against us. This couldn't be further from the truth. The [collaboration] agreements actually speak directly to the fact that they have a right to dissent.

But what they don't have a right to do is to dissent and not let us know about their dissent. What they *can* do is come to us and say, “you know what, we don't understand it”; “we don't agree”; “we don't want it.” And then we can have a rational conversation. If you're scared about something, come and talk to us so we can try to find common ground. P3

---

Take note: there is a dual audience here for messages that are “muzzled.” One communication channel is between communities and the media or general public; the second channel is between communities and industry corporations. Though the sender and message content is the same in each case, they can be treated as distinct communication events under the present framework. The described agreement does not restrict communication between community and industry. However, it *does* aim to confine expression of dissent **to** this communication channel.

Without considering these dual audiences, message expression would appear unobstructed. *One* pathway for communication is open—encouraged, even! If unique message content is treated as the unit of analysis, no speech has been prevented or blocked. However, our interaction model of non-listening treats sender-message-receiver arrangements as unique events. Under this paradigm, yes, the terms of such an agreement *do* restrict communication. Perceptions of “muzzling” are thus made clear: these views reflect a power differential and blocking interaction which limits or restricts certain communication *channels*.

These examples of external blocking have shown perspectives of those in power and perspectives of others who feel blocked by them. In the next section on self-blocking, only one perspective will be especially relevant. This is because self-blocking does not involve direct control from an entity that holds power.

## Self-Blocking

In some participant experiences where a message was blocked, the sender's choice in this had been more self-determined (Figure 4.11). In self-blocking situations, the perceived risks and consequences that constrain speech are more diffuse or indirect. The impetus for blocked expression is simple *lack* of control felt by a would-be sender, rather than deference to a specific and powerful external force. The “blocking force” in such situations is not a person or group at all—it arises from situational context.

In these cases, senders anticipated a threat or consequence originating from circumstance rather than from anyone's explicit or targeted reaction. For example, a sender's choice to express a message might weigh out possible costs or benefits to their personal relationships and social status. Still, these perceived risks could lead a speaker to self-censor.

In this next example, a participant tells how she would usually be up and “yelling about” any controversial issue she cared about. She *would* be doing it presently, she says—if not for her job and visibility in the community where she now lived. The deterrent she faced would not have come from anyone with *intent* to constrain her speech. It's not that community members wished not to hear or know her opinions; rather, that she foresaw consequences if she spoke her mind openly so that others *did* know.

---

If I believe in something passionately, I'm going to be at the front screaming and yelling about it. But! I've got to be careful. Because I can't be at the front yelling “Nuclear! Nuclear! Let's get nuclear [storage]!” when I work here. P7

---

This participant's silence demonstrates self-blocking because of public image, accountability and social pressures. Her desire to express her thoughts openly was overruled by other priorities in the choices she made to navigate her social context. As she goes on to say of herself: “[a] girl working here... has to sometimes keep her mouth shut.” [P7]

Another participant shared a similar example. Here she tells how some criticism of certain topics was taboo in a mining town:

---

If someone were to come forward who was against mining, it's kind of like: “okay, you're against the community surviving.” Without the mine we were going to be nothing. It's just not something that would ever be said. People would be like, “oh yeah, mining is hurting the environment,” but nobody would ever come forward and say: “that's a *bad industry!*” P10

---

It was unthinkable to speak against something so integral to her community: strong contrary opinions were restrained or blocked via social pressure. This shows yet another case where the risks of voicing a particular opinion were indirect, coming from social circumstance, rather than direct, coming from the reaction of a powerful entity.

To one extent or another, these self-blocking senders worry about how they will be perceived. The indirect social pressures involved in self-blocking often stem from fear of what other people will

FIGURE 4.11 – SELF-BLOCKING



### Self-blocking

**Focus:** a disempowered sender  
(lacks power to change situation)

*self-censorship; expected risks*

*implicit consequence from  
environment/circumstances*

*“blocker” = context or  
conditions*

*think* versus fear of what they will *do*. In one participant's experience, hostility in her community caused severe discomfort for her. She described feeling like she couldn't speak in meetings—couldn't say anything at all—*because* of how she might be seen by others.

---

I didn't like it. I felt like I don't—I can't even say anything because I don't want to be seen as for *or* against, you know? P13

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This participant was self-blocking in response to the atmosphere she experienced in meetings and public spaces. Even when it did not target her, *all* disruptive and aggressive behaviour contributed to her discomfort and reluctance to speak. Ultimately, she resolved to keep her opinions private from everyone—even those who she agreed with, and might have voted to support. “I wouldn't have told anybody,” she says; “it would've been a private thing.” [P13]

The same participant's experiences also illustrate one final facet of self-blocking interaction: sometimes, self-blocking is simply done in anticipation of a non-listening response. If you think a message receiver will never listen to what you say, why bother in the first place?

---

I feel that they're not the type of people who would listen—listen to my feelings or thoughts. And I think to myself, I don't need to explain myself. Why should I bother, if you're going to shun me based on my association with somebody and not even know what I'm thinking? P13

---

### ***Case Comparison***

So far, we have seen examples by participants in various roles (sender; receiver; observer). These examples and quotes have depicted elements of control, power dynamics, perceived autonomy, and risk that help to characterize blocking interactions as more self-determined or more external in nature. To further clarify these differences, this section will highlight two cases where the *same* participant kept silent for different reasons. In both situations, this participant—who we will call Carol—felt constrained from expressing or communicating something at her job.

In our first case (an example of self-blocking), Carol's supervisor had invited her to share ideas more openly. However, this same supervisor had shown a history of dismissing ideas, or stealing ideas without credit, when Carol had spoken up in the past. The boss wasn't directly *trying* to silence Carol's opinions, and Carol didn't think she was. But any history of past openness had caused unpleasant consequences which discouraged Carol from speaking up. Ultimately, she self-censored many of her ideas as a result.

---

I was very guarded... She made a point of it one day: she was like, “You don't really tell me anything.” But anytime I tried to tell her something, she'd steal my idea, or she wouldn't give me credit, or she just didn't want to hear it. P9

---

The supervisor had not acted with intent to block messages, though that was the ultimate effect. This deterrence of future messages may have been inadvertent. For Carol, expressing her ideas did not carry explicit consequences or threats, but did carry *implicit* social consequences in the context of a poor supervisor-employee relationship. The focus of this situation lies in the participant's position of lower power: as an employee, she had limited control over whether her ideas were listened to or given recognition. Carol's choice—to keep future ideas to herself—positions this interaction nearer to the “self-blocking” end of the spectrum.

When a powerful person or organization *does* threaten direct consequences for message expression, this falls more towards the “external blocking” end of the spectrum. In a different part of her interview, Carol tells about other messages she had refrained from expressing. In one case, she inwardly held criticisms of how certain monetary funds were being managed. However, Carol had seen someone else be critical of this situation and then lose their job:

---

I don't agree with it... but the woman who tried to tell them to spend it right got fired from him... so... p9

---

There is an inference made here, from Carol's perspective, that the other employee had been fired *in response* to opinions they expressed. The cause of Carol's silence, therefore, fits well with external blocking. Although Carol's choice to keep quiet was still—to an extent—self-determined, the trigger for her non-expression came from the threat of **negative consequences** from a **powerful entity**, in **direct response** to employee speech. Because of this perceived threat, Carol said she felt unable to express concerns. She did not feel comfortable speaking out:

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The people in those high positions... a lot of them come from [industry]. So I don't know how you're saying you're independent? ...but that's none of my business. [Laughs] Because I was on contracts. So it's not like, really, I can go and criticize them, right? p9

---

This has many attributes of “external” blocking. At least in the way that Carol perceives it, speaking would have carried a risk of direct retaliation from the company that employed her. The focus, from this perspective, is on the power held by the company. This dynamic is similar to another participant's view of government authority, where external blocking is made possible by threats of forceful legal control [P5]. Anticipating negative, direct responses from a powerful organization can cause someone like this participant or Carol to feel more constrained in their choices, even when silence is something they have consciously chosen.

For some interactions with external blocking characteristics—like this one—a self-censoring speaker may *seem* to have high autonomy. In situations where a speaker actively tries to speak but is prevented from doing so (silenced by meeting organisers, for example), power and control are very evident. But where a threat is enough to block speech completely, its influence may be subtle. Certain external threats may be harder for observers to recognize; they may not see the power imbalance that stops someone from expressing a message. Consider Carol's situation above. If someone else did not see a connection between the other employee's outspokenness and job termination, they might not evaluate this as a credible threat. Under this interpretation, Carol's silence would instead appear more “self-blocking” and less “external” in nature.

These differences reinforce the fluid, subjective, non-categorical nature of this spectrum. “Self-blocking” and “external blocking” are not so much categories as they are tendencies or attributes of an interaction. All are subject to perception and interpretation. Anticipated consequences for expressing a message are also informed by past experiences and observations. This is true for any speaker, no matter whether risks are direct and external, or indirect and situational.

Yet even a speaker's point of view may not have complete information. For example, a person who self-blocks due to social risks may not always be able to articulate what precisely those risks would be—just that they do not feel comfortable expressing themselves. Or, a would-be speaker may face direct external threats, yet prefer to explain their silence as an entirely autonomous decision. Framing a choice in this way could restore comfort and a greater sense of control.

### ***Communication Roles***

When blocking happens—especially in interactions that have “self-blocking” attributes—a choice to self-censor (or a choice to give up *trying* to speak) can share many similarities with the Withdrawal pattern of non-listening. In both self-blocking and Withdrawal, a person is responding to (past or expected) negative outcomes of a communication interaction. When the expected benefits of continuing an interaction do not outweigh its drawbacks, a person will choose to pull away and end their involvement in certain role(s).

But *which* communication role(s) is the person relinquishing as they pull away? This is the difference between Withdrawal and (self-)blocking. Withdrawal, as used in this framework, is the act of physically or mentally removing oneself from the role of *listener* in an interaction. Self-blocking, on the other hand, is holding back or removing oneself as a message *sender*.

**Retreat from listener  
versus sender role(s):**

<p><b>Withdrawal</b> = does not stay around to hear more (listener)</p> <p><b>Blocking</b> = does not voice or share own thoughts (sender)</p>
--

Withdrawal and self-blocking can and do happen together, if someone chooses to retreat from both a sender and listener role at the same time. The participant who felt great discomfort with the hostility in her community gives an example of this [P13]. In her case, this participant explained that tension and aggression in public meetings and social situations led her to avoid speaking her mind (self-blocking). At the same time, however, these tensions also caused her to participate less as a listener (withdrawal). The hostile atmosphere made attending meetings unpleasant, and she was reluctant to linger or engage as a listener with those who spoke or acted aggressively.



## 4.7 Disruption

In **disruption**, communication between a sender and receiver is disrupted by a third party. Disruption aims to increase **withdrawal**, **dismissal**, and **refusal** by message receivers. The third party feels disempowered, and their actions are a power play: a desperate effort to wrest more control in a situation where they feel little or none.

Disruption is the most visible form of non-listening. This pattern consists of vocal non-compliance with norms of social behaviour, and can include shouting, heckling, insults, rude outbursts, and other aggressive actions. These disruptive actions are intended to interfere in the same moment that a sender tries to convey a message (Figure 4.12).

Like Dismissal, Disruption non-listening is seen as very disrespectful. The power dynamics at play in each are different, however. Dismissal comes from a position of situational power, but Disruption comes from those who feel powerless. Disruption is also more aggressive, and takes place within a broader context where other potential audience members (besides the Disruptive non-listener) may be present. Many participants described experiences where they had encountered this type of non-listening:

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Then there was one or two, I'd say—a handful—who were very, very loud. And it would disrupt the meetings. P4

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[They] would get up and completely harangue whoever was trying to talk in a really, really mean way. It wasn't constructive. P11

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Disruption is intended to influence the listening interactions of these other receivers. It aims to interfere with communication and cause more non-listening to occur (Withdrawal, Dismissal, and Refusal). Although seen as hostile and rude, those who engage in Disruption see their tactics as justified, important, or even necessary. They may feel blocked or not listened to themselves, and Disruption may be their only recourse for regaining control in a desperate situation. The resulting disruption is often effective at causing interference for other senders and receivers.

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I just found it annoying—really annoying—when people were rude, and yelling, and not listening, and interrupting, and barging in. P8

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### Context

Disruption has a broader interpersonal context than other non-listening types. Refusal, Dismissal, and Withdrawal each described interactions that occur within sender-receiver dyads. Isolation and Blocking events, for their part, may not even *have* a clear dyad. Disruption is unique: it occurs in an interactive context with at least three parties:

FIGURE 4.12 – DISRUPTION



1. The message sender
2. The receiver(s)—who are the audience for that message
3. The disruptor(s)—*who may or may not* be part of the primary audience

Other non-listening types described ways that a person might react to a message directed at *their own self*. Instead, Disruption describes a reaction to messages directed at *someone else*. A person in a disruptor role inserts themselves as an interrupting third-party influence in the listening process of other sender-receiver dyads. Their actions show aggressive behaviour with the **intent** to inconvenience or interfere with a sender's message. In this example, a bystander interrupted a private conversation because he objected to what was being said:

---

I was talking with somebody about the fight that we're fighting. And he just walked up and pushed his way into the conversation! And I said: "you weren't invited into this." P6

---

A disruptive interjection comes at right angles to the message it interrupts. It cannot really be characterised as a response in the dialogue sense (responding to message content). Instead, it is a response to a sender's in-progress *attempt to convey* a message to one or more receivers—of whom the disruptor may or may not be one. Participants also described how disruptive lines of questioning, or certain expressions of opinion, could masquerade as dialogue without having meaningful *exchange* in their intent or in outcomes:

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They'd ask these questions and not even *wait* for answers. It was more like a statement. P13

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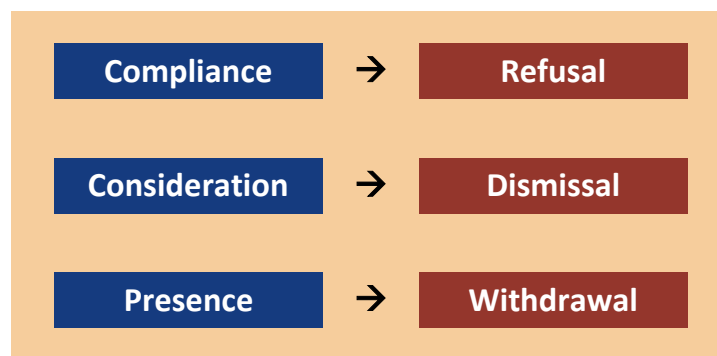
To me there's a huge difference between having a polite conversation with somebody about a difference in opinion, and waving your fingers in someone's face and talking forcefully with them—not really having a dialogue. P10

---

### ***Intent and Outcomes***

Disruption aims to stop *others* from listening to a message. It targets the process and outcomes of presence, consideration, and compliance. Tipping the scales of listening responses in others, disruption nudges each towards a corresponding pattern of *non*-listening (Figure 4.13). Disruptive non-listeners may provoke message receivers who are present to withdraw; they may persuade some who would consider a message to dismiss it; and they may lead others to refuse requests rather than comply.

FIGURE 4.13 – INFLUENCE OF DISRUPTION NON-LISTENING ON OTHER LISTENERS





Often, disruptive interjections and arguments are directed *to* a message sender, but with real interest in being heard by receiver(s)—the true intended audience. “Disruptive” questioning that seeks neither information nor understanding is one example. Here, a participant alludes to the influence of this that might sway consideration and compliance towards dismissal and refusal:

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I think they were trying to get people to be on their side; and discredit the people that were giving the information. I don’t know if it worked or not, but maybe it did. P13

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There was ample evidence to show that disruptive behaviours variously caused interference, delays, inconveniences, and other detriments to conversational interaction. When participants spoke about others who had acted disruptively, they very often expressed frustration and wished that it wouldn’t happen. The intent of Disruptive non-listening is to interfere; from examples like these, we can infer that it was often effective:

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[Some people] just wanted to stand in the back and chant, and not let us get work done. P1

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These people would just jump up in the middle of things and yell at you. Which isn’t fair. If you were trying to give someone information, if you were trying to answer a question that someone had—and they would just jump up and, you know, call you a liar. P11

---

A lot of us were not prepared for that type of interaction where people are, like, pointing fingers in your face! It became concerning for some of them. P5

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The intent behind Disruption is not so different from the intent of external Blocking entities who make intentional threats. In fact, Disruption arguably represents an incomplete *attempt* at external Blocking. Both are intended to inhibit the communication of another message. A person in a disruptor role may succeed in making things difficult, while at the same time not having sufficient power or control to block a message entirely.

### ***Power Dynamics***

Disruption tends to come from non-listeners who are *not* in a position of power. In interviews with participants, disruptive behaviour was often—but not always—associated with project opponents. Many of these incidents were described to occur in meetings whose organizers were neutral, in favour, or strongly supportive of a project. Thus when opponents acted disruptively, they were doing so from a position of low situational power. One notable exception involved a public meeting, organized by *opponents*, which flipped the script. Here, project opponents held situational power instead—and heckling came from project *proponents* in the audience.

#### **When *opponents* lacked situational power:**

---

There were certain people [**opponents**] who were part of the audience who I thought were very unprofessional sometimes—yes. Which really turned me off to their side! P13

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#### **When *proponents* lacked situational power:**

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At that particular meeting, there were people [**proponents**] who were booing the people who were talking and giving information. Saying, “That’s not true!” and all this stuff. P13

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Another participant relates how the behaviour of some protestors differed depending on setting:

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There were some instances where I observed that yes, [the protestors] did have constructive, good conversations with people on the committee [i.e. those in positions of power]. But publicly, they really didn't want to be a part of it. P10

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These so-named “constructive” conversations were occurring outside of formal meetings. Here, meeting organizers and protesters could be on more equal social footing. Whereas during meetings, those same organizers would be running the agenda, controlling speaking conditions for all attendees, and would possess more situational power in that context. This sort of imbalanced power dynamic is where Disruptive non-listening is likely to occur.

**Disruption challenges and threatens to tip the balance of power.** Disruption is not a show of power already held; it is a *power play*. It occurs when a person or group has little control over a situation and lashes out to fight back and resist disempowerment. Disruptive actions function to regain or to wrest some control over a situation where the disruptor has had none.

The balance of power or control in most situations and interactions, especially public meetings, is often held by larger organizations. Governments and corporations have access to funding and resources that individuals and other groups often lack. Control exercised by organizers, developers, or consultants may create circumstances where Disruptive non-listening is likely to emerge in resistance or as retaliation. Here, a participant with industry experience shares her own observation of this need for control by an organization:

---

They wanted to have absolute control over everything. They wouldn't be like: “Go do this and come back and tell me;” it was: “one of *us* should be there,” and “oh maybe—yes—I should be doing the talking.” Control, high control. Yes, it was frustrating. P9

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### ***Perceptions and Rationale***

Many participants—if not most—gave examples of Non-listening interactions that featured overt Disruption. Behaviours in this category were universally acknowledged as unpleasant or rude, no matter whether they were described by those doing the disrupting, by those whose messages were being disrupted, or by onlookers or other receivers of the message (audience members). Many participants expressed severe frustration with other people who showed Disruptive behaviour. People in any role were likely to agree that disruptive behaviour goes beyond lack of listening to show active, targeted disrespect.

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I see these people as being disrespectful and not listening. Not being here for information; just here to say “No.” and that's it. P13

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I found it uncomfortable in the meetings, and I was really annoyed... it's frustrating for other people who are there to learn. P8

---

Where is the difference in perception? **Those who act disruptively feel it is justified given the circumstances, while those who see it as inappropriate do not.** A person who is pressed into a disruptive response may feel powerless, frustrated, and not listened to by others. They may feel that someone else's behaviour has been unworthy of respect. They may feel that the urgency of a situation has made “more polite” behaviour ineffective or impossible. For them, taking disruptive action may be a last resort in a frustrating, high-stakes situation. This quote, for example, highlighted urgency and necessity as probable factors in Disruptive non-listening:

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My opinion is that they were taking it as “this is happening *tomorrow*; this will happen *next year*; this will be here within a year.” They really were thinking “now”—like this is detrimental *right now*. P10

---

Disruptive non-listening often occurred in exchange or response to other non-listening patterns. Several participants explained rude, Disruptive behaviour as a reactionary response from people who were not feeling heard at all. A person acting disruptively may have already received a non-listening response—especially Blocking, Refusal or Dismissal—to their own messages. After experiencing non-listening in that sender role, without a way to feel heard or listened to, they next respond with Disruptive non-listening towards other senders’ messages in turn.

Sometimes, disruptive yelling or loud outbursts do also convey a message of their own. These interruptions can represent an attempt to be heard *instead* and in face of another message that is seen as objectionable. One participant described how people behaving disruptively would tend to act out more and more towards the end of a meeting—perhaps as their patience wore thin and frustration grew over not feeling heard or listened to [P4].

Frustration was also described first-hand by those who experienced it, and who felt pressed towards a Disruptive response. In this example, a participant describes a time where her *own* mounting frustration threatened to explode outwards—against her better judgement:

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I was at the point where if he told one more half-story, I was either going to laugh—or get up and tell him he was full of shit. P11

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These circumstances might have led to disruptive non-listening—but the participant chose an alternative. “I had to leave early,” she says, to avoid an outburst like the one described. Faced with circumstances that pressured Disruption, her only other avenue was to remove herself from the situation—to Withdraw. In fact, Withdrawal versus Disruption was often portrayed as a forced choice situation. Sometimes it was framed as an independent choice as it was here. Other times, the choice was imposed on others by those in control of speaking conditions.

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We would ask people three times to wait their turn. And then we would say “okay, if you're going to continue to disrupt this meeting and interrupt the process of learning, we're going to ask you to leave unless you can be quiet and wait your turn to speak.” P1

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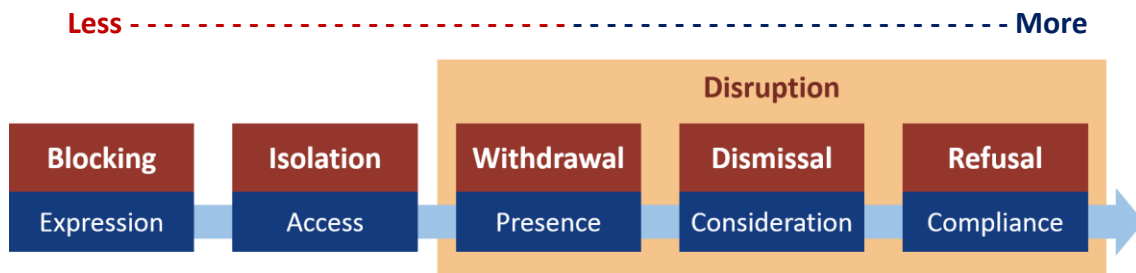
## 4.8 Model Summary

The current model seeks to explain why and how different events are *perceived* as listening or non-listening interactions in a controversial context. Listening is often thought of as an objective action—something that one can “do” or “not do.” But this view is restrictive. No matter what the circumstance, telling someone “no, you’re wrong about what listening means” will never improve a situation or help anyone feel listened to. Listening can mean different things across different perspectives. This new model strives to capture and make sense of these divergent viewpoints.

The current model’s broader definition recognizes many types of perceived non-listening, all of which are subjective interpretations. Certain non-listening types make it especially clear that listening is more than just action. Isolation and self-blocking, for example, are not actions that someone intentionally does to stop listening from happening. There does not always exist a non-listener, going out and spreading non-listening everywhere. And even when there is a clear “non-listening” actor—in cases of dismissal, for example, and disruption—each enacts “not-listening” in a very different sense. The dismissive non-listener declines to listen to a message in a very specific way, whereas the disruptive non-listener attempts to interrupt and prevent *others* from listening. As for blocking interactions, on the other hand, these instead represent what someone or a situation has failed to accomplish: the comfort and setting and speech conditions necessary for open sharing are not present.

The overall model depicts perceptions of listening and non-listening as a variable-length chain of sequential process interaction. Unambiguous listening involves a 5-step process of several interactive traits. Each step—expression, access, presence, consideration, and compliance—represents the opposite of a non-listening interaction type. These steps are sequential, as each step depends on the success of the steps before it. From left to right, the five stages of listening (and corresponding non-listening types) represent an increasing extent of message transmission and acceptance (Figure 4.14).

FIGURE 4.14 – EXTENT OF MESSAGE TRANSMISSION AND ACCEPTANCE


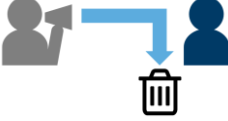






The further an interaction progresses along the stages of listening, the more likely that those involved will label it as such. In this sense, the length of the chain is variable. An interaction that stops at *Dismissal* will very likely be described as non-listening. However, three of the listening stages would still apply to that interaction: expression, access, and presence. As such, this new theoretical model offers a way to reconcile perceptions of listening versus non-listening (a binary label) within a broader conceptual framework of listening as a sequential process. The next section will give a final overview of the six non-listening types in table format.

## 4.9 Notable Characteristics of Six Non-listening Types

Table 4.2 summarizes some key features that distinguish different types of non-listening interactions. More clarity and detail on this information can be found in the previous sections. This table is intended to serve as a quick-reference tool.

TABLE 4.2 – NOTABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF 6 NON-LISTENING TYPES

Non-Listening Pattern Type	Context	Power Dynamics	Outcome(s)	Engagement	Perceptions
<b>Refusal</b> 	Sender-receiver dyad	Receiver holds power	Message receiver does not comply with expectations for change	Engages with content of message; good faith response	Receiver: sees as thoughtful consideration Sender: depends how listening is conceptualized
<b>Dismissal</b> 	Sender-receiver dyad	Receiver asserts power over sender	Sender's message is unheard or disregarded	Receives message and responds; disregards/rejects content	Receiver: sees as reasonable, justified Sender: sees as disrespectful
<b>Withdrawal</b> 	Sender-receiver dyad	Receiver asserts limited power over self	Sender-receiver interaction is terminated	Receives message but <b>disengages</b> from a listening role	Seen as not listening and low-effort
<b>Isolation</b> 	No mutual access for sender-receiver communication	[various]	Persistent gaps of disconnectivity in a communication network	Total lack of engagement	Perceptions vary on who should have access and who is responsible to facilitate that access
<b>Blocking</b> 	Prospective sender-receiver dyad; no message expression by the sender	Disempowered sender. Varying focus of power imbalance	Frustration by sender, who feels a lack of control or autonomy	Would-be sender is constrained from engaging in that role	Where lack of control is external, its influence may or may not be overtly perceived
<b>Disruption</b> 	Sender-receiver dyad + third party	Those who disrupt are disempowered; the disruption itself is a power play	Interferes; encourages refusal, dismissal, and withdrawal by others	Interrupts another sender's attempts to engage with others	Unambiguously seen as rude and aggressive. Perceptions vary on whether circumstances warrant or justify it.

## 5. Discussion

In the previous section I presented all major concepts from the new theory of non-listening. This section offers a brief discussion of the relevance and applicability of this new framework. I first discuss its implications for theory: I review its relevance to MAS theory of marketing systems and present justification for using the “theory” label to describe this new framework. Next, I demonstrate its ability to generate testable propositions. I then address its limitations and generalizability. Finally, I discuss implications for stakeholder engagement practice.

### 5.1 Implications for Theory

The current theory offers value that existing typologies and listening scales have not provided. This integrated framework goes well beyond a qualities or features list in order to map out connections between concepts of listening and non-listening in real world situations. Layton (2015) spoke about understanding social phenomena by explaining how individual actions lead to certain likely social outcomes. The present theory targets this goal. As a model, it works to explain perception, interpretation, and outcomes of both listening and non-listening dynamics.

The new framework complements recent developments in macromarketing and stakeholder theory. Layton’s Mechanism-Action-Structure (MAS) theory of marketing systems puts a focus on processes instead of variables (Layton 2015). Similarly, the present framework highlights a variable-length process of listening interactions and ways that this process is limited, halted or interrupted. MAS theory emphasizes the interconnectedness of actors in a network. As does the current framework, MAS theory acknowledges all stakeholders as actors in their own right, with choices and actions that interact with one another to drive systemic change. MAS theory is concerned with deep understanding of complex, interconnected systems in order to better analyze and improve the function of those systems:

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Where a marketing system is seen as not working as well as could be expected, a first step is often to consider whether all the primary and secondary social mechanisms are contributing as they should.

(Layton 2015, p. 309)

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Listening is a critical social mechanism for communication, shared understandings and trust (Layton 2015) in multi-stakeholder networks. The present theory offers itself as a diagnostic lens for understanding failures to listen and systemic barriers to listening. By applying this new framework, we can investigate the complexities of difficult, conflict-ridden situations and reveal new understanding of the relevant social dynamics.

Some researchers may disagree with my choice of “theory” label for the non-listening framework presented here. In Kathy Charmaz’ (2006) explanation of constructivist versus objectivist grounded theory, she explains some differences in how theory is viewed within paradigms with more interpretivist or more positivist leanings. My own work leans constructivist and interpretive.

The theory that results is an interpretation of how individuals perceive and interact within their own circumstances and communication interactions. Charmaz describes her own concept of theory as follows:

---

Theories flash illuminating insights and make sense of murky musings and knotty problems. The ideas fit. Phenomena and relationships between them you only sensed beforehand become visible. Still, theories can do more. A theory can alter your viewpoint and change your consciousness. Through it, you can see the world from a different vantage point and create new meanings of it.

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(Charmaz 2006, p. 128)

The current theory offers heightened understanding of interpersonal dynamics present in non-listening interactions. It takes a complex phenomenon, non-listening, and breaks it down into understandable patterns and relationships that make sense. By studying **non**-listening, it has even created new meanings of listening itself—modelling this as a five-step process interaction with the possibility of being limited or thwarted at each stage.

## 5.2 Testable Propositions

A key component of strong theory is that it provides grounds for generating new hypotheses. These can be formalized in a set of propositional statements or can be diffuse in a more narrative-style explanation of a phenomenon (Charmaz 2006). Corbin and Strauss (1990) call these “conceptual linkages” and agree that in qualitative research, they are unlikely to be presented as a list and are more often found woven into a text.

The present theory offers a new way of understanding listening and failures to listen. Like other qualitative work, the conceptual linkages it generates are found throughout the text. Nevertheless, I want to highlight some examples of these in order to demonstrate the strength of the current theoretical framework (Table 5.1). Each of these linkages takes the form of an **if-then** propositional statement (Charmaz 2006). Readers will note that the concepts are generalized beyond the substantive area of stakeholder engagement, reflecting the potential of this framework to represent a general theory for understanding non-listening.

Readers should remember that this table only represents a small selection. A close reading of the Findings and Analysis section will yield many more examples of propositional theory: by my count there are over a hundred. In Table 5.1 I showcase some of the strongest and most testable examples. By testable, I mean that any of the following propositions could be the subject of empirical testing with quantitative research designed to ascertain a causal or correlational connection between their concepts.



TABLE 5.1 – TESTABLE PROPOSITIONS PUT FORWARD BY THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

<b>Refusal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>If</b> people in an interaction disagree about A) whether change is a criterion for listening, or B) whether a received message has been thoughtfully considered, <b>then</b> they will have divergent perspectives on the interaction and on whether listening has occurred.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> someone holds an asymmetrical paradigm for communication, <b>then</b> they may evaluate listening using different standards for different roles. In an informer-informant paradigm, for example, listening in one direction does not equate to listening in the other direction.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> a person is evaluating their own response to a message, <b>then</b> they will be more generous in characterizing it as “listening” than they might be when evaluating someone else's behaviour. This is because they are privy to their own internal process of giving fair consideration to message content.</li> </ul>
<b>Dismissal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>If</b> a receiver perceives a sender to lack awareness, or to have background knowledge and/or priorities that are misaligned with the receiver's own, <b>then</b> the receiver may dismiss the sender's message on this basis.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> the power held by a message receiver is lessened or constrained, <b>then</b> their freedom or flexibility to respond with dismissal may become more limited.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> message senders perceive receivers' responses as dismissive, <b>then</b> they will lack trust in the receivers' willingness to listen.</li> </ul>
<b>Withdrawal</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>If</b> withdrawal is unilateral, <b>then</b> it can be felt as hurtful and mostly represents a rift in or breakdown of an existing relationship.</li> <li>• However: <b>if</b> withdrawal is mutual (negotiated and agreed upon by both parties), <b>then</b> it can be a positive way to mediate relationship conflict.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> there is a <i>very</i> large power imbalance, this may limit a message receiver's autonomy such that <u>certain kinds</u> of withdrawal actions are no longer possible. For example, a person might retreat internally but may not be able to physically leave the room.</li> </ul>
<b>Isolation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>If</b> a person is present for one, heard message and withdraws in response to it, <b>then</b> they may also create self-isolation to future, <i>unheard</i> messages. Isolation often follows withdrawal, wherever a person has the autonomy to remain isolated at their own wish.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> a person rigidly conceptualizes their own role in a communication context (by seeing themselves in a sending messages role only), <b>then</b> they may effectively isolate or insulate themselves from receiving messages—an unintentional form of self-isolation.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> attention or awareness is lacking, or if communication pathways in a network have been overlooked, <b>then</b> isolation may occur without the intent or desire of any party.</li> </ul>
<b>Blocking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>If</b> two people (interactants and/or observers) perceive the threats, risks, and consequences afforded to a speaker differently, <b>then</b> they can form different opinions on the autonomy afforded to that speaker under the circumstances.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> someone holds power and participates in creating restrictions, <b>then</b> they likely will not feel a lack of control, so they will not see those restrictions as a barrier to communication, but rather see them as facilitating communication instead.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> restrictions attempt to block certain communication channels (i.e. the expression of messages to certain audiences), <b>then</b> this is perceived as blocking or muzzling by those affected. This is true even if there are no restrictions placed on expression of the same message content to another communication channel.</li> </ul>



<b>Disruption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>If</b> a person in a communication context feels powerless and unfairly controlled, <b>then</b> disruption may be their only route for regaining some control in a desperate situation. They will see such tactics as justified or even necessary.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> disruption occurs, <b>then</b> it is sometimes effective at influencing listening interactions between others to be or become non-listening ones.</li> <li>• <b>If</b> more attempts to control and restrict are made by those holding power, <b>then</b> more disruptive non-listening is likely to arise in response, proportionate to the degree of power and threat present.</li> </ul>
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### 5.3 Limitations

As a qualitative study, this research is not limited by sample size in the same way that quantitative research would be. Similarly, the theory generates testable propositions, which mitigates its limitation of being descriptive rather than empirical. The depth and generalizability of the resulting theory demonstrate its explanatory power for other situations. Aside from even the appearance of this framework as a suitable “fit” for general theory, there are additional, theoretical grounds for the likelihood that it will generalize across other situations and demographics.

With this sample focusing on women’s perspectives, it is true that we are unable to look in-depth at male attitudes and perceptions, except from second-hand accounts. To look at how men first-hand might perceive female attitudes and experiences of listening and engagement would be an entirely different matter. It could tell us other things, to be certain, but would require its own investigation. The goal of this study was not to compare male experiences with female experiences, nor to contrast male perceptions of women’s experiences with women’s own perceptions. Our goal was specifically and fully to understand the experiences of women in their own words, from their own viewpoints.

What are the boundaries of what we can learn from having limited this study’s participants to women only? True that we cannot *automatically* generalize to populations at large or to groups of men. However, most of the six non-listening types involve a strong element of power dynamics. It might be less of a stretch to imagine that similar themes would be found in the experiences of demographic groups who are marginalized in other ways, for example by education, ethnicity, or socio-economic status.

Research shows that for controversial, risk-laden technologies, women’s attitudes and risk perceptions align very well with, for example, attitudes of men of color. For women of color, these two influences effects stack to be even more risk-averse than either group on their own (Slovic 1999). In light of these differences, white males can be seen as the anomaly, not the norm. As a group, these men have experienced more consistent examples of empowerment and privilege in their lives. Because of this, they have a more of an internal locus of control and so judge external risks to be less severe and of less concern than others do. Slovic (1999) accordingly proposes that risk perception is related to feelings of control and autonomy. Feelings of uncertainty and lack of stability are experienced more often by marginalized others, shaping their tolerance for uncontrollable “dread” risk.

Although demographics differ, comparable interpersonal dynamics can offer grounds for applying this new theory more generally. Power and control hierarchies are everywhere, especially (but not only) in the realm of stakeholder engagement. Participant experiences in this study yielded many examples of non-listening characterized by power differentials. *Dismissal* non-listening involves

a strong power dynamic, with dismissive message receivers in a position of power. *Blocking* involves a power dynamic where message senders feel profoundly disempowered. *Disruption* occurs when those with low power take action to wrest some control in a desperate situation. Power and control feature prominently in all these communication interactions and more. Especially for these situations of large power imbalance, experiences of non-listening are likely to generalize beyond this study's demographic or context.

The involvement of power dynamics in this theoretical model raises questions about gender and culture. In the presence of gendered power dynamics, are some types of non-listening affected by gender? For example, withdrawal might be more often employed by women than by men due to gendered social expectations and norms about confrontation and assertiveness. Future research might explore this through gendered analysis of non-listening interactions. The same goes for culture. How do cultural norms and expectations affect the model and explanation of different non-listening interactions? Cultural and gender influence on the model is something to explore in future work.

In summary, this non-listening framework is a promising candidate for becoming general theory. Future work could validate this theory by applying it to an analysis of other stakeholder contexts. Other, future studies could design empirical testing of propositional statements generated by this framework. Testing and validation of this theory are still necessary to see how well it can give insight to other situations beyond the demographic and contexts explored in this study. But, as a starting point, the present theory offers itself to help explain a wide range of situational dynamics.

## **5.4 Implications for Practice**

What can be done to correct the frustrations found in conventional stakeholder engagement practice? Some research has discussed different types and outcomes of stakeholder engagement. Bowen, Newenham-Kahindi and Herremans (2010) define interactions along a continuum of transactional, transitional, or transformational. With existing theoretical models, we may be able to examine some real-world situations and characterize them along such continuums. But solutions for wicked problems—how to *bring about* transitional or transformational results in difficult settings—are not always obvious (Cuppen 2012). In fact, those ideal outcomes may not be possible under all circumstances. Merely organizing an attempt at a town hall does not guarantee its success nor does it automatically transitional engagement make. There is a need for more fine-grained diagnostic tools that can examine the processes and social mechanisms by which different interaction dynamics are created and changed. By looking at individual experiences of non-listening, we can better understand how the same action taken by an organization can succeed or fail at achieving different levels of engagement with different individual stakeholders.

Existing scales and listening checklists are not well-grounded in theory. Fontana, Cohen and Wolvin (2015) tried but were unable to categorize different listening scales in a way that made sense. However, the items *from* various listening scales might be more meaningfully grouped, especially with the help of theoretical grounding from the present study. One could, for example, take existing listening scales and identify traits from them which, when absent, reflect certain types of non-listening. An integrated non-listening scale, adapted from other scales and based around the new theory, could then offer a useful diagnostic tool for the current theoretical framework.

If listening is treated as an action or checklist in accordance with pre-existing scales, this can lead to adverse outcomes. Stakeholders in a network may spend time and other resources on trivial

concerns, working to resolve issues that do not pose the largest barrier. For organizations concerned with their public perception, treating listening as a checklist also gives an impression of low care and depersonalization.

Instead, the current theoretical model treats non-listening as a symptom to be diagnosed. It takes an interactive approach where non-listening is not a “wrong” action but rather an interactive phenomenon that occurs in certain communication dynamics. Message senders and receivers are always acting in response to their own unique circumstances and challenges. The point is not to assign fault or blame, but to identify clashes where interactive forces are not serving the best needs of those involved. This new paradigm allows a targeted, systems approach to finding and amending barriers to listening. It is systems-based and therefore does not place the weight of change only on one party. Changes might be made anywhere and can be made by any stakeholder working within their own locus of control.

Using this new theory of non-listening, real-world situations can be diagnosed and differentiated at a higher level of detail. This model offers a way of understanding and separating one type of “stuck” communication from another, different type. Structural barriers to listening may be uncovered and then addressed. Even where thorny problems and interpersonal conflict prove too difficult to resolve to an ideal outcome, harm can be at least mitigated. And resources can be saved by applying efforts where they are likely to address underlying causes rather than applying solutions blindly. We can better identify, for any organization involved in a stakeholder network, where resources can be applied to best alleviate sources of non-listening. For example, changing an audience response from dismissal to consideration may be difficult, but identifying avenues to alleviate blocking and isolation may be much more fruitful. Everything will depend on the individual situation; there is no one-size fits all. What this framework offers is a new and useful tool for *differentiating* unique features of individual situations.

## 6. Conclusion

This study used in-depth interviews to learn about the experiences of Saskatchewan women in a controversial stakeholder engagement context. I employed grounded theory analysis to uncover patterns and propose explanations of complex relationships related to non-listening interaction. Through this process I identified six non-listening patterns: blocking (the absence of expression); isolation (a lack of access); withdrawal (a lack of presence); dismissal (a lack of consideration); refusal (a lack of compliance); and disruption (a targeted influence on others' interactions).

The main takeaway is this: there exists a range of ways in which listening is qualified and understood by stakeholders. This new theory grants insight to the multiple perspectives and often conflicting interpretations of different participants in a communication setting. Researchers can apply this new framework to analyze complex situations, fitting with network models of stakeholder theory and Layton's (2015) MAS theory of marketing systems. The framework generates a multitude of testable propositions, and while limited in scope still gives a great deal of generalizability to other communication contexts. Practitioners, too, will find that this framework gives insight and understanding for identifying barriers to listening.

To my awareness, this work represents the first ever grounded study with a specific focus on **non-listening**. By this it has constructed a detailed theoretical framework for understanding non-listening interactions and also the listening process itself. In essence, this entire project represents an extensive, negative case analysis for understanding listening in ways that no research has done before. The insights it brings are novel, useful, and applicable across contexts.

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## Appendix A: Summary of Participant Demographics

<b>Participant no.</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Roles and affiliations</b>
<b>1</b>	North	industry—other; volunteer
<b>2</b>	South	industry—corporate
<b>3</b>	South	industry—corporate
<b>4</b>	North	local government
<b>5</b>	North	local government; volunteer
<b>6</b>	North	community member
<b>7</b>	North	education
<b>8</b>	North	volunteer; community member
<b>9</b>	South	education; industry—other
<b>10</b>	North	volunteer
<b>11</b>	North	community member; local government; volunteer
<b>12</b>	North	volunteer; community member
<b>13</b>	North	community member
<b>14</b>	North	community member
<b>15</b>	North	media
<b>16</b>	North	community member
<b>17</b>	North	education; community member
<b>18</b>	North	local government

## Appendix B: Ethics Approval Certificates

2016-2017



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board

### *Certificate of Approval*

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR  
Kalowatie Deonandan

DEPARTMENT  
Political Studies

BEH#  
16-117

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CONDUCTED  
La Ronge Saskatoon

Creighton

SPONSOR(S)

FUNDER(S)

SYLVIA FEDORUK CANADIAN CENTRE FOR NUCLEAR  
INNOVATION

WOMEN IN MINING CANADA  
WOMEN IN NUCLEAR CANADA

TITLE

Establishing Social License: Women, Respect, and Stakeholder Engagement in the Nuclear Sector

ORIGINAL REVIEW DATE  
07-Apr-2016

APPROVAL ON  
10-May-2016

APPROVAL OF:  
Application for Behavioural Research Ethics  
Review  
Letter of invitation for focus group  
Participant consent form for focus group  
Focus group guide  
Letter of invitation for interview  
Participant consent form for interview  
Interview guide

EXPIRY DATE  
09-May-2017

Full Board Meeting ☐

Date of Full Board Meeting:

Delegated Review ☒

#### **CERTIFICATION**

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of its implementation.

#### **ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS**

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and upon study completion.

Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <http://research.usask.ca/for-researchers/ethics/index.php>

Vivian Ramsden, Chair  
University of Saskatchewan  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Ethics Office  
University of Saskatchewan  
Box 5000 RPO University, 223-110 Science Place  
Saskatoon SK S7N 5C9  
Telephone: (306) 966-2975 Fax: (306) 966-2069

2017-2018



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

## Certificate of Re-Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR  
Kalowatie Deonandan

DEPARTMENT  
Political Studies

BEH#  
16-117

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT  
Town of La Ronge SK

City of Saskatoon SK

Town of Creighton SK

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S)  
Ellen Lloyd, Jacqueline Schoenfeld

FUNDER(S)  
SYLVIA FEDORUK CANADIAN CENTRE FOR NUCLEAR INNOVATION

SPONSOR(S)  
WOMEN IN MINING CANADA  
WOMEN IN NUCLEAR CANADA

TITLE  
Establishing Social License: Women, Respect, and Stakeholder Engagement in the Nuclear Sector

RE-APPROVED ON  
17-Apr-2017

EXPIRY DATE  
16-Apr-2018

Delegated Review: ☒ Full Board Meeting: ☐

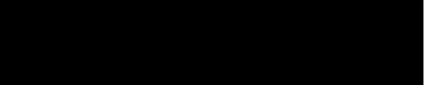
### CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2 2014). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

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Vivian Ramsden, Chair  
University of Saskatchewan  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Services and Ethics Office  
University of Saskatchewan  
Room 223 – Thorvaldson Building  
110 Science Place  
Saskatoon, SK Canada S7N 5C9

2018-2019



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB)

## Certificate of Re-Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR  
Kalowatie Deonandan

DEPARTMENT  
Political Studies

BEH#  
16-117

INSTITUTION(S) WHERE RESEARCH WILL BE CARRIED OUT  
Town of La Ronge

City of Saskatoon

Town of Creighton

SK

SK

SK

STUDENT RESEARCHER(S)  
Ellen Lloyd

FUNDER(S)  
SYLVIA FEDORUK CANDADIAN CENTRE FOR NUCLEAR  
INNOVATION

SPONSOR(S)  
WOMEN IN MINING CANADA  
WOMEN IN NUCLEAR CANADA

### TITLE

Establishing Social License: Women, Respect, and Stakeholder Engagement in the Nuclear Sector

RE-APPROVED ON  
23-Mar-2018

EXPIRY DATE  
22-Mar-2019

Delegated Review: ☒ Full Board Meeting: ☐


### CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2 2014). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

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 Scott Bell, Chair  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
University of Saskatchewan

Please send all correspondence to:

Research Services and Ethics Office  
University of Saskatchewan  
Room 223 – Thorvaldson Building  
110 Science Place  
Saskatoon, SK Canada S7N 5C9



UNIVERSITY OF  
SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 23-Aug-2019

## ***Certificate of Re-Approval***

Ethics Number: 16-117

Principal Investigator: Kalowatie Deonandan

Department: Department of Political Studies

Locations Where Research

Activities are Conducted: Town of Creighton, Canada  
Town of La Ronge, Canada  
City of Saskatoon, Canada

Student(s): Ellen Lloyd  
Stephanie Pankiw  
Toveli Schmuland

Funder(s): Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation

Sponsor: Women in Mining Canada  
Women in Nuclear Canada

Title: Establishing Social License: Women, Respect, and Stakeholder Engagement in the Nuclear Sector

Approved On: 22/03/2019

Expiry Date: 21/03/2020

Acknowledgment Of: N/A

Review Type: Delegated Review

\* This study, inclusive of all previously approved documents, has been re-approved until the expiry date noted above

### **CERTIFICATION**

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2 2014). The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this project, and for ensuring that the authorized project is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

### **ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS**

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the following website for further instructions: <https://vpresearch.usask.ca/researchers/forms.php>.

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***Digitally Approved by Vivian Ramsden, PhD  
Behavioural Research Ethics Board  
University of Saskatchewan***

## Appendix C: Recruitment Email Sample

### EMAIL TEMPLATE—PARTICIPANT CONTACT

Dear [Dr./Ms./Mr.] name,

As a student at the University of Saskatchewan, may I ask for a few minutes of your time to consider helping with a research project for my master's thesis?

I am working alongside Dr. Maureen Bourassa (a professor in Marketing) and Dr. Kali Deonandan (a professor in Political Studies). We are hoping to hear from women in Saskatchewan who have engaged in conversations about nuclear energy or uranium mining through work, personal life, or as active community members. Through this, the project's goal is to add greater understanding that may help to identify strategies for more respectful engagement on controversial topics. Because of your [involvement with thing or community or organization], name, I would be very interested to hear about your own experiences.

We invite you to share these experiences with us in an interview later this summer. This interview, arranged for a time and place at your convenience, would last up to one hour and would allow you to discuss the issues you that are most important to you as you share your thoughts. As a participant you would receive an honorarium of \$50 to thank you for your time spent participating with this project.

The privacy of each interview is very important to us. If you choose to participate, no one except the researchers will know your identity. An audio recording of the interview itself will be copied out in written form so that people, places, company names, and other identifying information can be removed and kept completely confidential. Only non-identifying information will be included in any results of the project that are shared.

I would welcome a chance to speak with you briefly, get to know you a little better, and answer any questions you might have about this project! I will try to reach you [at your office] by phone [today or tomorrow] between [1:00 and 3:00pm], but if there is a better day or time I could call (or if you prefer not to be contacted) please reply to this email and I will be happy to oblige.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Ellen Lloyd  
*Graduate Student (Master's)*  
Edwards School of Business  
**University of Saskatchewan**  
25 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, SK, Canada S7N 5A7  
ellen.lloyd@usask.ca



## Appendix D: Participant Information Letter



### Letter of Invitation and Information

Ellen Lloyd  
Graduate Student (Master's)  
Edwards School of Business  
University of Saskatchewan  
PotashCorp. Centre, 25 Campus Drive  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada S7N 5A7  
Phone: (306) 966-6719  
Email: ellen.lloyd@usask.ca

[CURRENT DATE HERE]

Re: Letter of Information Regarding the Project:  
***Women and Stakeholder Engagement in the Nuclear Sector***

Dear [NAME HERE],

Thank you for your interest in our research study on nuclear energy and stakeholder engagement with women. This letter gives details about participation. If you choose to participate, we will go over these details together and obtain your permission in a consent form when we begin our interview.

Our project is examining the perceptions of women in Saskatchewan in interactions and stakeholder engagement processes with a focus on nuclear energy. We are conducting in-depth interviews with women to better understand these issues by exploring the personal experiences and thoughts of women on nuclear energy. By participating in this study, you and other women will contribute to an improved understanding of processes that influence interactions and stakeholder engagement with regards to nuclear energy and to the identification of strategies that have the potential to lead to more respectful stakeholder engagement.

Those who agree to participate in this study will meet for a face-to-face or a telephone interview at a mutually convenient time and location. The interview is expected to last up to one hour. During the interview, we will discuss your thoughts and insights on the topics outlined above. You will be free to discuss the issues that you feel are most important. You are not obliged to answer any questions that you find objectionable or that make you feel uncomfortable. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with your participation in this study.

All interviews will be digitally recorded. You will be asked for permission to record your interview in a consent form. These recordings will be transcribed onto paper so that the content of the interviews can be analyzed for themes. As soon as the interviews are transcribed, you will be assigned a pseudonym (i.e., another name) so that no one will know your true identity. Only the researchers of this project will have access to the recordings and be able to identify you with a recording. All transcripts will be identified by your pseudonym. If transcription services are used, the transcriber will hear the recording, but will not be told your identity. The transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Quotes from your interview may be included in the written report and any subsequent publications, but you will not be identified in any report or publication. If your participation in this study resulted from a colleague's recommendation, your participation will remain confidential. The colleague who recommended you will not be told that you chose to participate. The recordings and transcripts, when they are not in use, will be securely locked. Once the study is complete, all records including the electronic and paper files will be securely stored. Given our keen interest in this topic, the data may be useful to future research.

The final report and any other publications resulting from this study will not include any names or other information that would allow a reader to identify you or anyone else who has been interviewed. As already explained, pseudonyms will be used to refer to you and to the other participants in the transcripts, the final report and any other publications resulting from this study.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time, and/or to refuse answering certain questions. (You may withdraw from this study until the results have been disseminated; after this, it may not be possible to withdraw your data.) To thank you for your participation, you will be given an executive summary of our report. In the event that you withdraw, you will still receive a copy of the executive summary. You will also receive an honorarium of \$50 to thank you for giving your time to participate in our study.

For more information about this study, or if you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Ellen Lloyd ([ellen.lloyd@usask.ca](mailto:ellen.lloyd@usask.ca), 306-966-6719), Kalowatie Deonandan ([kalowatie.deonandan@usask.ca](mailto:kalowatie.deonandan@usask.ca), 306-966-2167) or Maureen Bourassa ([bourassa@edwards.usask.ca](mailto:bourassa@edwards.usask.ca), 306-966-2119).

The University of Saskatchewan General Research Ethics Board approved this study on May 10, 2016. (Contact person and information is Beryl Radcliffe, 306-966-2084).

Warm regards,



**Ellen Lloyd**

On behalf of Kalowatie Deonandan and Maureen Bourassa:

**Dr. Kalowatie Deonandan**

Associate Professor  
Department of Political Studies  
College of Art & Sciences  
University of Saskatchewan  
9 Campus Drive  
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Phone: (306) 966-2119  
Email: [bourassa@edwards.usask.ca](mailto:bourassa@edwards.usask.ca)



## Appendix E: Consent Form



### *Participant Consent Form*

**Project Title: Women and Stakeholder Engagement in the Nuclear Sector**

**Researcher(s):** Dr. Kalowatie Deonandan, Associate Professor of Political Studies, Department of Political Studies, College of Art & Sciences, University of Saskatchewan, 9 Campus Drive, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada S7N 5A5  
Phone: (306) 966-2167, Email: kalowatie.deonandan@usask.ca

Dr. Maureen Bourassa, Assistant Professor of Marketing, Edwards School of Business  
University of Saskatchewan, PotashCorp. Centre, 25 Campus Drive,  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, S7N 5A7  
Phone: (306) 966-2119, Email: bourassa@edwards.usask.ca

Ellen Lloyd, Graduate Student, Edwards School of Business  
University of Saskatchewan, PotashCorp Centre, 25 Campus Drive,  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, S7N 5A7  
Email: ellen.lloyd@usask.ca

**Co-Primary investigator(s):**

Dr. Loleen Berdahl, Professor & Head of Political Studies, Department of Political Studies,  
9 Campus Drive, Arts 280, University of Saskatchewan,  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, S7N 5A5  
Phone: (306) 966-1952, Email: loleen.berdahl@usask.ca

Dr. Scott Bell, Professor of Geography and Planning, Department of Geography and Planning,  
117 Science Place, Kirk Hall 109, University of Saskatchewan,  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, S7N 5C8  
Phone: (306) 966-5676, Email: scott.bell@usask.ca

**Purpose(s) and Objective(s) of the Research:**

- Increase understanding of nuclear energy stakeholder engagement process with regards to perceptions of respect.
- Increase understanding of consequences of women's perceptions of lack of respect.

**Procedures:**

- Individuals who agree to participate in this study will meet for a face-to-face or a telephone interview at a mutually convenient time and location. The interview is expected to last up to one hour. During the interview, we will discuss your thoughts and insights on the topics outlined above. You will be free to discuss the issues that you feel are most important. You are not obliged to answer any questions that you find objectionable or that make you feel uncomfortable. There are no known physical, psychological, economic, or social risks associated with your participation in this study.
- All interviews will be digitally recorded. You will be asked for permission to record your interview in a consent form. These recordings will be transcribed so that the content of the interviews can be analyzed for themes. You may request that the recording be turned off at any time during the interview.
- Please feel free to ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or your role.

**Funded by:** Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation and Women in Mining and Women in Nuclear Saskatchewan Inc. (WIM/WiN SK)

**Potential Risks:**

There are no known physical risks or economic risks associated with the participation in this study. However, it is possible that, given the controversial nature of nuclear issues, that interview participants might experience some emotional discomfort around experiences of disrespect.

Should you wish to discuss this situation, the contact information of the researchers are included at top of this letter. Also the details for contacting the Research Ethics Office at the University of Saskatchewan are below:

Office of Research Ethics  
University of Saskatchewan  
223 - 110 Science Place  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon SK S7N 5C9  
Email: [ethics.office@usask.ca](mailto:ethics.office@usask.ca)  
Tel: 306-966-2975  
Fax: 306-966-8597

**Confidentiality:**

- As soon as the interviews are transcribed, you will be assigned a pseudonym (i.e., another name) so that no one will know your true identity. Only the researchers of this project will have access to the recordings and be able to identify you with a recording. All transcripts will be identified by your pseudonym. If transcription services are used, the transcriber will hear the recording, but will not be told your identity. The transcriber will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. Quotes from your interview may be included in the written report and any subsequent publications, but you will not be identified in any report or publication. If your participation in this study resulted from a colleague's recommendation, your participation will remain confidential. The colleague who recommended you will not be told that you elected to participate. The recordings and transcripts, when they are not in use, will be securely locked. Once the study is complete, all records including the electronic and paper files will be securely stored. Given our keen interest in this topic, the data may be useful to future research.
- The final report and any other publications resulting from this study will not include any names or other information that would allow a reader to identify you or anyone else who has been interviewed. As already explained, pseudonyms will be used to refer to you and to the other participants in the transcripts, the final report and any other publications resulting from this study.

**Compensation:**

An honorarium of \$50 cash will be provided to each interview participant.

**Right to Withdraw:**

- Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time, and/or to refuse answering certain questions. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.

- You may withdraw from this study until the results have been disseminated; after this, it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Follow up:**

- To thank you for your participation, you will be given an executive summary of our report in electronic format. In the event that you withdraw, you will still receive a copy of the executive summary. Summary results of this study will also be posted to our website (<http://ssrl.usask.ca/npri>).

**Questions or Concerns:**

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office [ethics.office@usask.ca; (306) 966-2975]. Out of town participants may call toll free (888) 966-2975.

**Consent:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my/our questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____	_____	_____
<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
_____	_____	
<i>Researcher's Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>	

***A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.***

## Appendix F: Sample Interview Guide (anonymized)

### NOTES

- [Job title]
  - [Roles and responsibilities]
  - [Connection to nuclear topics and discussions]
  - [My first impressions from communications with interviewee to date]
- 

### INTERVIEW GUIDE for FirstName LastName Women & Nuclear Project As of DATE, YYYY

#### *Throughout the interview, here are useful prompts that can be used:*

- *Would you say more about that?*
- *Would you elaborate on that?*
- *That is helpful, would you say more?*
- *That is really interesting, can you tell me more... (who, what, when, where, how)?*
- *I'm beginning to see how this works, go on.*
- *You said X, what do you mean by X?*
- *I'm not sure I understand what you meant by X, would you elaborate?*
- *I want to make sure I understand what you are saying, it would help me if you could explain a bit more.*
- *How does X compare to Y?*

#### **Description of the project**

- We are interested in descriptions of your personal experiences with and related to the nuclear sector
- We are interested in stories about your conversations and interactions with others
- Your experiences as a woman are also interesting to us
- Reminder that your responses are confidential, and they will also be anonymized outside of this room – you and anyone you talk about in this interview will have their identities protected
- Ethics forms/protocols

#### **Background**

- Would you tell us about your role as [job title]?
  - o Responsibilities, interactions, experiences, observations...

#### **Conversations**

- During the time of [organization name]'s involvement with the [town name] community, what organizations and groups did you see having conversations about nuclear topics?
  - o Examples: media, town/city council(s), protestors, committees...
  - o Which of these groups or people did you interact with directly?

- In recent months (or in the past if more relevant) where and with whom have you personally had conversations with others about nuclear topics?
  - o Examples: groups mentioned, family and friends, community members...
- Can you tell us about a time when you had (or saw) a particularly positive (negative) interaction with others (or between others) about nuclear issues?
  - o Who was involved?
  - o What happened? What were the outcomes?
  - o Why was it positive (negative)?
  - o (What did you say?) What did others say?
  - o How did you feel?
  - o What might have been done differently?
  - o Probe for respect
- Thinking about conversations about nuclear issues, can you describe one that you saw/overheard (or were involved in) that you felt was a (not a) success?
  - o What made it successful (unsuccessful)?
  - o Include probes for empathy (trust, perspective taking, emotion)
  - o Who/what/why/what happened? Etc.
  - o Why was it positive (negative)?
  - o What did you say? What did others say?
  - o How did you feel? How do you think others were feeling?
  - o From what you've seen, how do the perspectives of those in [GROUP A] compare with the perspectives of those in [GROUP B]?
  - o What might have been done differently?

**Language and Understanding of Concepts (from personal & company perspective)**

- How do you understand the term "stakeholder"?
- What does the term "social license to operate" mean to you?
  - o How does a/any company know that it has achieved social license?

**Experiences as a Woman**

- Would you tell us about your experiences as a woman working with [group] in [town name] during the [organization name]'s involvement here?
- Would you tell us about your experiences as a woman interacting with others or seeing others' interactions about nuclear topics?

**Closing**

- Is there anything you wished we would have asked you that we didn't?
- Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?
- Thank you very much for talking with us today...

## Appendix G: Diagram—6 Types of Non-Listening

### patterns of *non-listening* interactions

*"It totally **turned me off**, their behaviour. I figured: I can't be listening to you because you're not making any sense. And I better have an open mind about this, and not listen to people who [behave like that]."*

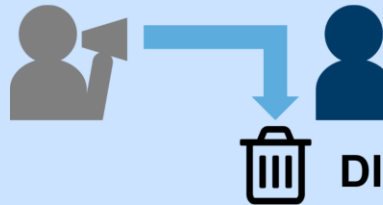
[participant 13]



**WITHDRAW**

*"Because they might have an engineering degree, or whatever type of degree, they're like, 'Well I'm more educated than those people, so **whatever, I'll play the game.**'"*

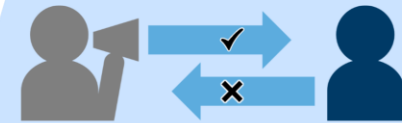
[participant 1]



**DISMISS**

*"She was angry. [I think] she felt like she wasn't getting heard. And they weren't listening to her and **they weren't stopping** the procedure."*

[participant 4]



**REFUSE**

*"People would be talking about it but I never paid any attention. I **never had any interest** in it whatsoever... and it didn't interest me to know anything about it."*

[participant 17]



**ISOLATE**

*"I was at the point where if he told one more half-story, I was either going to laugh—or **get up and tell him** he was full of shit."*

[participant 11]



**DISRUPT**

*"I was very guarded... Anytime I **tried to tell her** something, she'd steal my idea, or she wouldn't give me credit, or she just didn't want to hear it."*

[participant 9]



**BLOCK**